Guitar MAGAZINE

MAY 2021
ISSUE 392
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HOW TO BE A MODERN GUITARIST

ARTISTS AND INFLUENCERS CHIME IN ON THE STATE OF GUITAR CULTURE IN 2021

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TAME IMPALA'S KEVIN PARKER: "GUITAR WAS MY EVERYTHING"

REIMAGINING THE JAZZMASTER FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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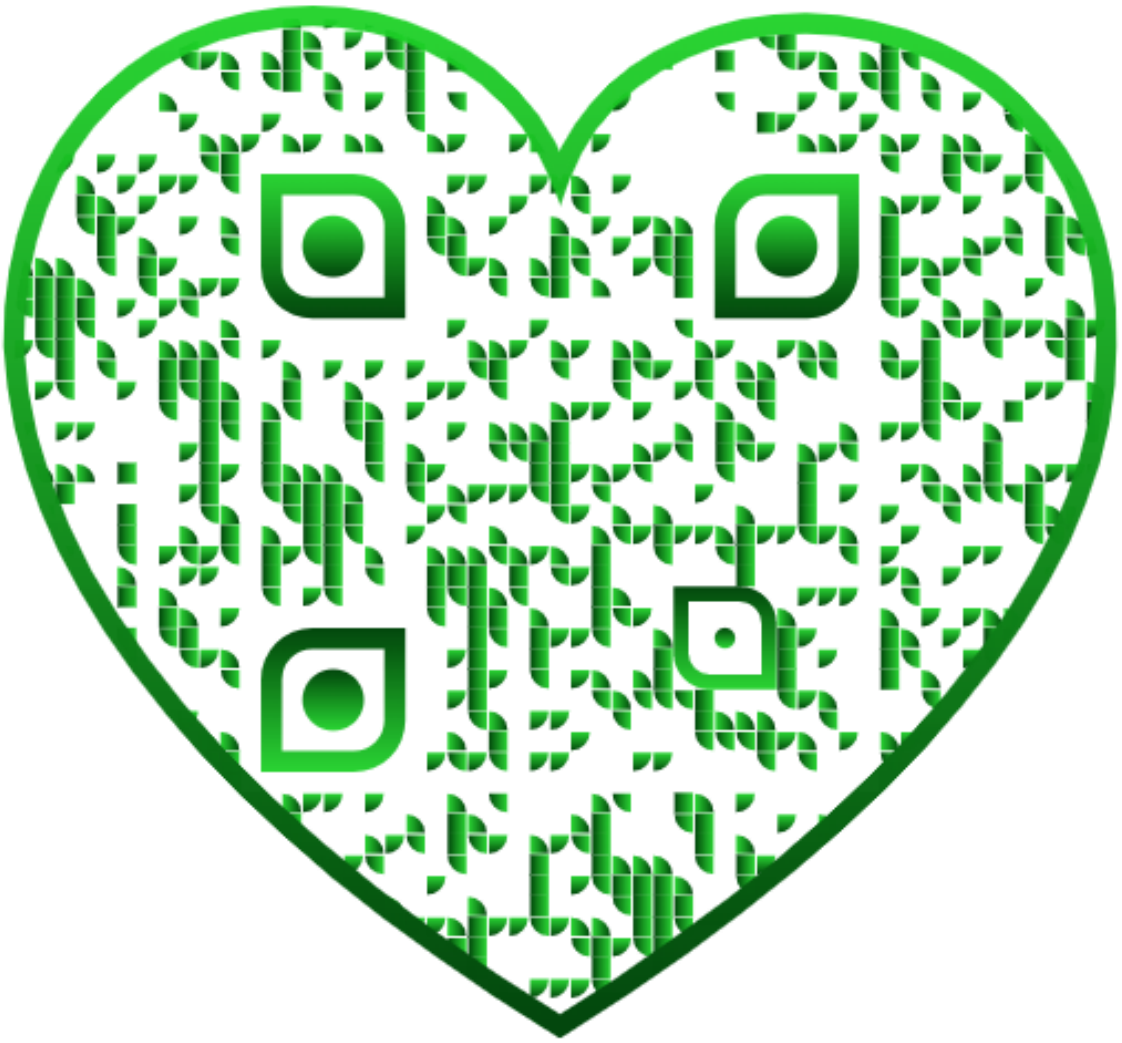

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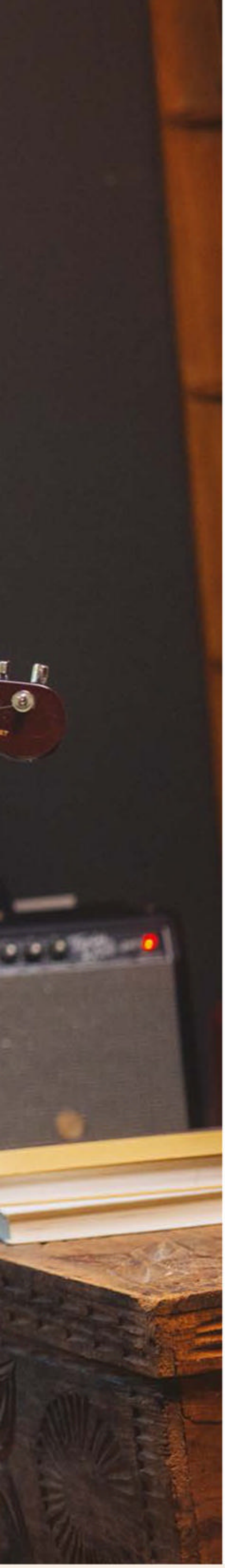

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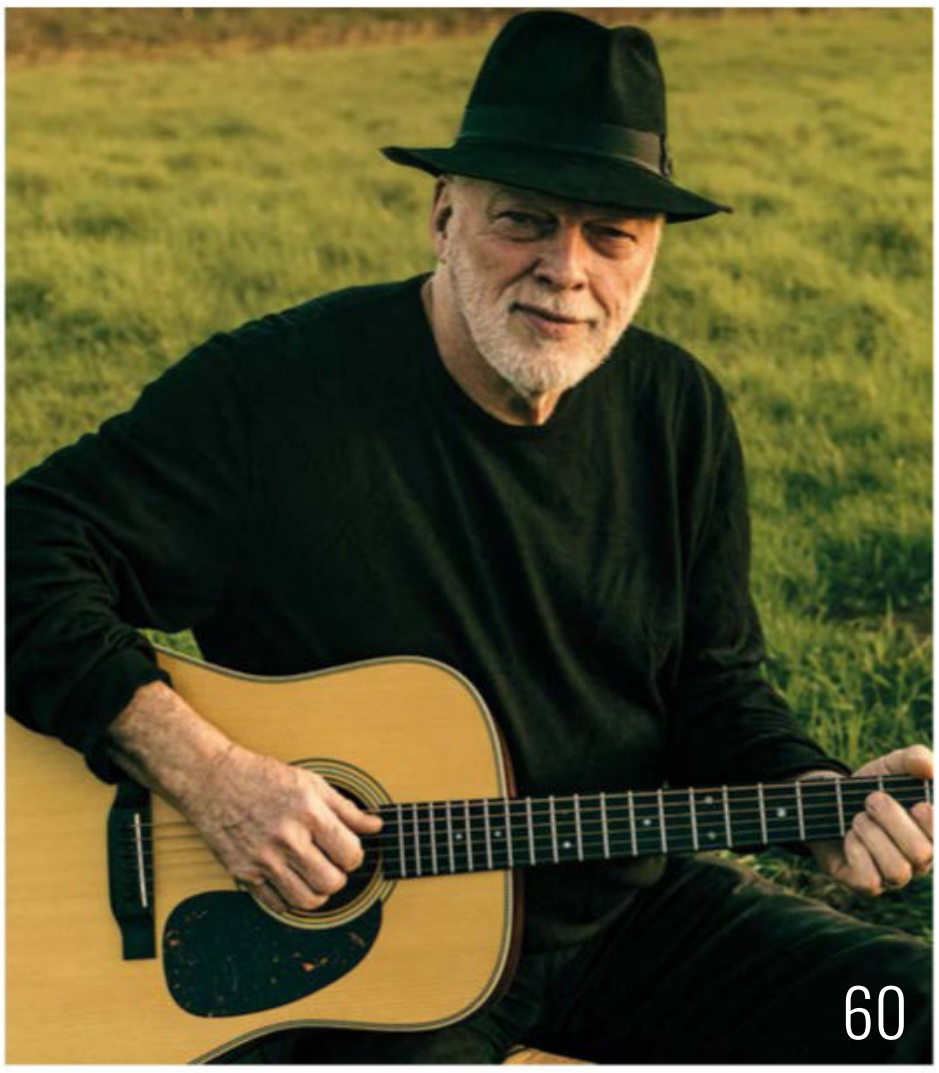
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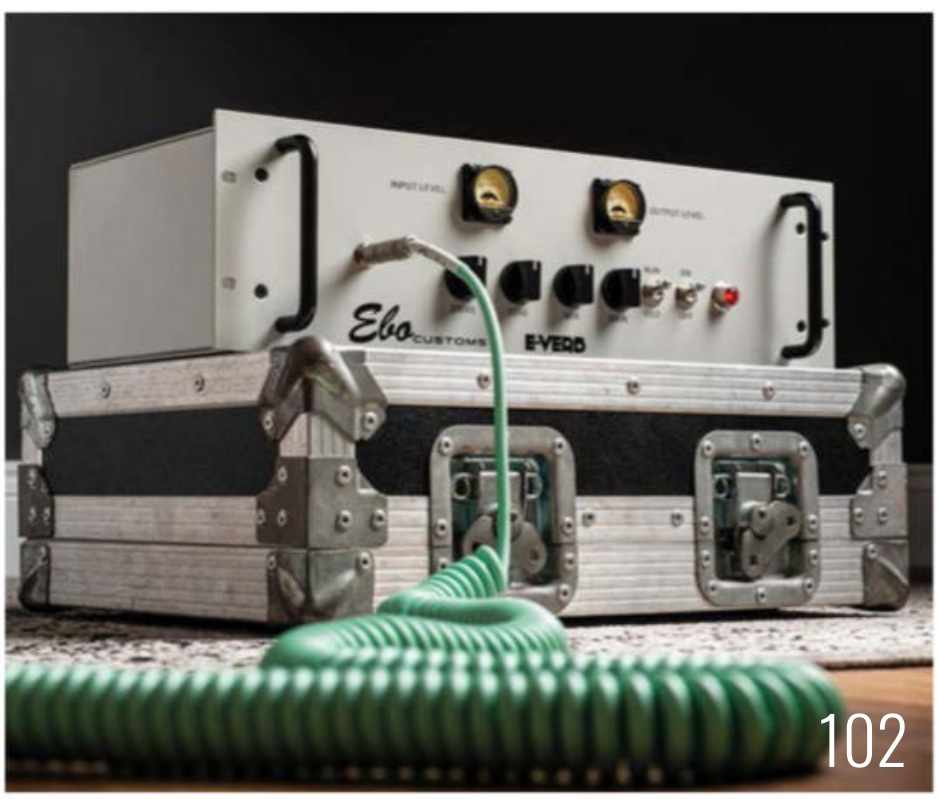

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BandLab UK Limited
Unit 7, Riverside Court,
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EDITORIAL

CHIEF EDITOR Chris Vinnicombe
MANAGING EDITOR Josh Gardner
ART EDITOR Philip Millard
PRODUCTION EDITOR Sean McGeady
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Sam Roberts
INSTRUMENT PHOTOGRAPHY Eleanor Jane
CONTRIBUTORS Michael James Adams, Chris Fantana, Rod Fogg, Leigh Fuge, Dave Hunter, Jazz Martin, Ed Oleszko, Huw Price, Richard Purvis, Rachel Roberts, Josh Scott, Gary Walker, Michael Watts
HAVE A STORY? Email us at editors@guitar.com

SALES

ASSOCIATE MANAGER, COMMERCIAL AND PARTNERSHIPS Joe Supple
joe.supple@guitar.com

PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS

PUBLISHING PRODUCTION MANAGER Craig Broadbridge
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5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Meng Ru Kuok
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Ivan Chen
UK COUNTRY DIRECTOR & HEAD OF STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS (EMEA) Holly Bishop
AVP, WEB TECHNOLOGIES Laurent Le Graverend
AVP, GROUP & BRAND STRATEGY Krystle Hall
ART DIRECTOR Simon Freeborough
MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY Iliyas Ong
ASSOCIATE MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY Terence Stanley
STAFF WRITERS Cillian Breathnach, Daniel Seah
ASSOCIATE, CONTENT PRODUCTION Billy Chua

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EDITOR'S LETTER

STATE OF THE NATION

For many of us, the past 12 months have meant adapting to a life without gigs and in-person rehearsals, finding ways to collaborate with bandmates remotely and reworking our rigs for direct recording and low-volume settings. I, for one, cannot wait to get back into a sweaty rehearsal room with a drummer and turn my amp up *loud*.

However, the notion of what it means to be a modern guitarist is much more existential than that, so we rounded up a panel of artists, makers and influencers to ask them what they think about the state of guitar culture in 2021. Their answers are fascinating, entertaining and thought-provoking, and you can read what they had to say in this month's cover feature, which begins on p40.

With the tantalising prospect of live music returning this summer, this issue's artist interview line-up feels, quite accidentally, like we've assembled the fantasy festival bill of my dreams. Taking place over two days (I'm too old and tired to recreate the five-day Glastonbury marathons of my teens and twenties) and featuring two headline acts, Tame Impala's swirling psychedelic daydreams and Teenage Fanclub's blissful harmonies and frayed guitar lines would do very nicely indeed. Back in the real world, read what Tame Impala polymath Kevin Parker and Teenage Fanclub's legendary guitar duo Raymond McGinley and Norman Blake had to say when we caught up with them on pages 20 and 30 respectively.

That's it from me until next month – enjoy the mag and head to *Guitar.com* for your daily dose of guitar news, reviews, features and tutorials.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

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Guitar CONTRIBUTORS

In this month's cover feature, we survey a swathe of players, makers and influencers about what it takes to be a modern guitarist. Here, we quiz our contributors on the gear that's kept them sane throughout the trials and tribulations of the past year

CHRIS FANTANA

FIXER-UPPER

Former guitar teacher Chris launched British boutique outfit Rift Amplification in 2013 and now spends his time building and fixing amps. Flip to p118 for his latest project. "I get much gratification from fixing other people's shoddy workmanship," he says. "It's not something you can charge for, mind!" Over the past 12 months, one of his guitars has really proved its worth. "My 1960 Epiphone Century has been a home-practice revelation. Loud enough unplugged that I can play sans amp, yet toneful enough that it doesn't sound flat."

RACHEL ROBERTS

THE NEXT GENERATION

Journalism student Rachel joined us for work experience this month. The virtual nature of her placement might have robbed her of the opportunity to meet the team in person, but she still got stuck into writing features and news for us. Over the last year, she's got reacquainted with an old friend. "My Martin Smith acoustic is cheap and cheerful, but was passed down to me and has been heavily modded over the years," she explains. "Playing it reminds me of gigging as a teen, and keeps me hopeful that we'll be able to enjoy live music again."

RICHARD PURVIS

TONE KING

A year indoors has seen Richard uncover a new facet of his favourite all-rounder. "I used to rely on my Tone King because it's brilliant at everything," he says. "Now I rely on the attenuation control on the back of the amp, because it's also brilliant at -36dB." For this issue's lead review, we had him play quietly too. "The tricky part of reviewing the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster was working out what to plug it into," he says. "Maybe Fender should design hybrid acoustic/electric amps too." A fair point, Richard. Flick to p74 for his judgement.

JOSH SCOTT

HISTORY BUFF

While his first two columns for the mag proved that JHS Pedals founder Josh is obsessed with the history of guitar effects, he took it to the next level this month by debuting *Guitar Pedals: The Musical* – an honest to goodness musical comedy about the history of stompboxes. Watch it for yourself at pedalsthemusical.com. As for his essential gear, it's something he knows intimately well: the JHS Morning Glory Overdrive. "I loved it when I first designed it in 2008," he says, "and it hasn't left my pedalboard since."

GARY WALKER

JAGUAR FANCIER

Over the past year, former *Guitar Magazine* managing editor Gary has had to master remote recording with his band Lespectre. He has one pedal to thank for keeping things fresh: the Chase Bliss Mood. "Don't ask me what it does – or how – but this insane granular delay/reverb/looper will be all over our next album," he says. Turn to p30 for Gary's interview with Teenage Fanclub's Raymond McGinley and Norman Blake. "I'm not at all jealous that Raymond bought two 1960s Fender Jaguars for about $300 a piece. Not in the slightest…" Do we sense sarcasm?

MICHAEL WATTS

TIMBER LOVER

Award-winning acoustic player Michael was perfectly placed to test out Taylor's new all-koa model. "I'm a bit of a pervert when it comes to exotic tone woods," he says, "so opening up the GT K21e before I'd even had my morning coffee was quite a moment!" Head to p94 for Mike's verdict. Having recently signed to an online-concert agency, Mike's gear has taken on a new lease of life. "My Kostal signature model acoustic and pair of Microtech Gefell M300 mics now let me play to people all over the world at the same time."

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

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REZNORATOR BLUES

Hi, folks. I was wondering if you have any advice for someone who last picked up their guitar as a teenager and is now starting their 30s and looking to get back into it again.

My music tastes have changed since I was a teenager (thankfully). I'm more into electronic work now, where any sounds created through a guitar are distorted to the point of barely sounding guitar-like anymore; it's more textural, wall-of-noise stuff, guitars that sound like synths (thanks, Trent Reznor). It's basically where electronic music and guitar music intersect.

The guitar I have, an ESP LTD EC-50, is built for playing hard rock/metal and I recently bought a new amp, a Fender Mustang LT25 combo, which has some brilliant effects and presets. I'm looking to get into making stuff that's more like what I listen to. But I'm not sure where to start. What would you recommend?

ALEX VISSARIDIS, VIA EMAIL

Welcome back to the wonderful world of guitar, Alex. You're certainly jumping in with both feet but we can set you on the right course to bridging the gap between guitar and electronic music. Everyone from Tom Morello and Jonny Greenwood to this month's Guitar Interview subject, Kevin Parker, has been preoccupied with making their guitar sound like something else entirely – and the way they've gone about it has by and large been the same: pedals, pedals, pedals.

Your Mustang amp has some great onboard effects and we're sure there's plenty of esoteric fun to be had with the reverse delay, step filter and octave fuzz. But if you really want to get weird, you're going to want to get hold of some gear that you can manipulate in real time.

Our first suggestion would be a looper. The ability to layer parts on top of each other, manipulating them as you do, is a tried-and-true method of messing with your guitar sound. A basic looper such as TC Electronic's Ditto would be a good start. Beyond that? Well, experimentation is your friend. Perhaps your best bet would be a fully featured multi-effects unit that gives you the freedom to explore effects? The Line 6 POD Go offers a wealth of effects types and an enormous amount of flexibility that you could use to create sonic chaos – and many multi-effects units also have a built-in looper too.

If you really want to immerse yourself in the electronic realm, why not invest in a guitar synth pedal? The Boss SY-1 and Electro-Harmonix Superego are fun and affordable routes to this. If you're feeling flush, go for the Meris Enzo, an instant route to guitar-synth nirvana.

STRAIGHT SIX

I read with interest the article on the Fender Deluxe amps in the April edition. It astounds me some 84 years after its first introduction in 1937 that the 6V6 is still being discussed – and by young guitarists! The 6V6 was well out of date back in the early 1970s, when I used to take old radios apart to build amplifiers as a lad. But it was common in these old 1940s and 1950s radios.

I find it fascinating how the power stage evolved from the concertina and side-branch phase splitter in earlier the models to the long tail pair, and also how fixed bias took over from cathode bias – although Dick Denny and Charlie Watkins used cathode bias in the AC30 and ER15. I have to say, Fender did squeeze every last watt out those 6V6 tubes in fixed bias though.

I have to be honest: back in the dark days of the valve amplifier in the late 70s, when I left my job at Roost Amplification, if someone had told me that valve amplifiers would still be being discussed some 42 years on, I don't think I would have believed them!

TERRY BATEMAN, VIA EMAIL

FLYING SOLO

I just finished reading Huw Price's two-part series on converting an Epiphone Flying V to 1950s spec and just wanted to take a second to write in to thank you for publishing this series. I've since gone through and read a slew of other how-to topics from your magazine but this is the one that pulled me in. I've been wanting to tackle this conversion myself for a while now, so I might be pestering Huw for tips at some point soon!

SPURGEON DUNBAR, VIA EMAIL

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ONES TO WATCH

THE SNUTS

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

Thanks to a string of sharp singles and EPs, The Snuts are on the cusp of breaking through to the big time. We meet Joe McGillveray to talk new album *W.L.*, sharing a stage with the likely lads, and why it's important to leave space

West Lothian four-piece The Snuts have been shaking up the UK indie scene for more than five years now, blending singalong festival anthems with dissonant guitars and even a hint of Laurel Canyon-esque emotion. Their sophomore EP *Mixtape* was well received and saw them claim a spot in the UK Top 20 and reach No.1 on the Scottish charts, all while hitting 30 million streams on Spotify. For their newly released debut album *W.L.*, the Scots worked with Tony Hoffer, the platinum-selling producer of records by Supergrass, Beck and The Kooks. With the band poised to become one of the most prominent acts in the country, we meet guitarist Joe McGillveray to talk curating the new album, the influence of Frank Zappa, and just being happy to get out of the house.

You've been considered a hot new band for quite some time. Why is now the right time to release your first full-length album?

"It's been a long time coming but we have always been super-aware of how important a band's debut record can be for them. We've had songs for years but we wanted to make sure that the finished product felt like a polished piece of work. It definitely feels like what we have now is representative of who we are, and something we can be proud of."

What can we expect from the album?

"The way I think about it is that *Mixtape* is like one chapter and *W.L.* is the whole story, from being four wee boys with cold hands playing five-string guitars in snowy forests to doing this for a job and playing to stages and crowds all over the world."

The Snuts, left to right: Jordan Mackay, drums; Joe McGillveray, guitar; Jack Cochrane, vocals/guitar; Callum Wilson, bass

© GAZ WILLIAMSON

What did Tony Hoffer bring to the table for *W.L.* and how did he shape your sound?
"Working with Tony's been really good. He's a guitar player at heart so he's able to translate our semi-musically illiterate gibberish surprisingly well. We've been lucky enough to work with some really great producers but Tony is pretty open about what he's doing so it's easy to learn a lot while you're working with him. He's all about trying things before ruling them out and he's not hemmed in to making any one kind of record, which was ideal for us too."

What song stands out the most on the album?
"There's a song called *Top Deck* that I remember Jack [Cochrane, vocals and guitar] playing six or seven years ago in my first flat. It floated about for a while but it was probably a bit too delicate for the type of gigs we ended up getting used to, so it never got too much attention from us. Then, a few months ago, after we'd pretty much finished recording everything, Jack wrote a second verse that ties everything together into something really powerful and that really sets the tone for the rest of the record."

What inspired you to pick up the guitar?
"My first guitar was an old Strat that my brother had under his bed. I'd pick it up every now and then but when I was about 12, I heard Frank Zappa covering *Stairway To Heaven* on an obscure live album of my dad's [*The Best Band You Never Heard In Your Life*, 1991] and it was like, 'Ahh, right'."

Tell us about your main guitar rig and pedal setup.
"I mostly gig with a Fender Strat going into a Blues Junior or Victory V40. On the board, I've got a Hudson Broadcast on pretty much all the time, a Tube Screamer for a push, and a JHS Crayon or a Si Fuzz Face for fuzziness. I've got an EHX Superego for holding notes, and I've got a TC Electronic Hall of Fame and Flashback for delay and reverb. My girlfriend actually got me a talkbox for Christmas as well, so now I've got that to try and work out too!"

What's interesting about your approach to playing?
"I just try to serve the song, to be honest. I like to play where a good backing singer would sing. I used to want to throw blue licks and mini solos into every space but I've learnt that more often than not, less is more, and the space is what makes it that much more dramatic when you do want to kick it up a gear."

What's your most memorable gig and when can we see you play next?
"We played with The Libertines last September in Newcastle. We were mega into them growing up, so we were happy just to be playing alongside them. But they were super-friendly, and stood and watched both our shows, and were just generally lovely guys all round. They played a fuckin' class show too. We've got a UK tour in the spring if all goes to plan."

Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?
"If it's not roaming the wastelands à la *Mad Max*? Hopefully still in music. We've all been doing a lot more production during lockdown, so I'd like to get better at that. But to be honest, I'll just be glad if we're out the house." G

The Snuts' debut album *W.L.*, is out now on Parlophone Records

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

SMITH/KOTZEN

SMITH/KOTZEN

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Richie Kotzen has lent his hand to almost every genre going. Now he's taking a chance on an R&B-infused album with someone who also knows a bit about writing hits: Iron Maiden's Adrian Smith

The new collaborative record between Richie Kotzen and Adrian Smith is as fun to listen to as it must have been to write and record. "It was meant to be," says Kotzen. "I've been a fan of Iron Maiden my whole life. The nature of what we wrote dictated the direction of the album. We went in and let the music take its course."

The record weaves between Kotzen's fusion-based R&B and Smith's rootsy blues melodies. What's impressive is the pair's ability to allow space for each other to sit neatly within the tracks, often acting like a road-tested band rather than players collaborating for the first time. Here, Kotzen picks out his top tracks.

TAKING MY CHANCES

"The coolest part of this song for me is the opening main riff that Adrian also plays in the verse. He came in with that riff and we wrote the song from there. I remember more about how we wrote that, because I actually jumped behind the drums. It was the only song we really jammed and recorded, and then used some of those parts for what you actually hear on the recording. Specifically, for guitar parts that I did, there's a middle section there that's kind of unique, very typical to something that I would do – before it goes into the solo, we're doing this unison line. It's pretty much pentatonic-based but the note sequence is kind of tricky."

'TIL TOMORROW

"Here we've got a long outro where we play the solo and trade off with each other. That's a highlight of the album. When we do those kinds of solos there's a lot of improv. My approach is always to see what I come up with live, just play and improvise and mess around. If I hit something, great. If not, we come back and pick it up. Often, I'll hit something in the beginning and in the end, and then I'll go back and redo the middle section. That's the beauty of being in the studio."

I WANNA STAY

"My gear was pretty straightforward on this record. I used the signature model Telecaster that I have with Fender. I also have a Strat with them, and those are really the two guitars that I play most of the time. Although, on *I Wanna Stay*, I played a solo and used Adrian's guitar. The guitar that I grabbed was all amped up and ready to go and it had a locking tremolo – I think it was a Jackson. I did this whole solo where I was using the tremolo bar and really kind of laying on the thing like I used to when I was a teenager. So, when I go back and hear that solo, it hits my ear a little odd. It's like, 'Wow, it sounds like me but like me from 30 years ago'. That was kind of a cool moment for me."

SCARS

"I've got a rhythm part on here that's playing arpeggios and I use this rotating speaker effect, I guess a Leslie simulator, and that's in my fly rig. The only pedal I really used was the Richie Kotzen Fly Rig from Tech21. In the old days, on a lot of my recordings, I'd go in the studio and instead of using a chorus we'd plug the guitar into a real Leslie, where you have a preamp for it. Producers loved that trick. We actually ran vocals through them for certain things too. But now, with technology, you can get a similar sound without having to drag around a big piece of furniture."

SOME PEOPLE

"I like the rhythm part on this track. It has a really open sound. I remember that I played that using fingerstyle, plucking on the strings, like pulling on them, as opposed to striking them with a pick. There's a lick inside the main riff and the fingerstyle gives it a different sound, especially when you're striking the string with a pick – you'll try to hit them all at once but technically you are not, you're sliding over the strings. If you're pulling the strings, you can get four strings or whatever it is with your fingers, and it has more of a snap sound to it."

Smith/Kotzen's self-titled debut is out now on BMG

© John McMurtrie

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

PHIL X & THE DRILLS
"I Love You" On Her Lips

Bon Jovi's resident guitar-slinger returns to his solo project with this dirty, driving proto-punk release, which melds 2000s-era drive with brash falsetto vocals and typically obscene guitar solos.

MOGWAI
Ritchie Sacramento

Inspired by the late musician, poet and cartoonist David Berman, Scottish post-rock hero Stuart Braithwaite delivers an airy vocal underpinned by a glorious central riff that's just drowning in delay.

GARY MOORE
In My Dreams

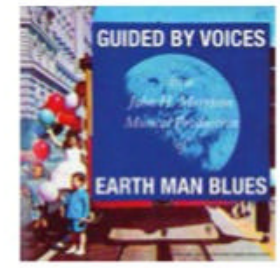
A decade years on from Moore's passing, this previously unreleased track is the headline cut from new album *How Blue Can You Get*, which immerses listeners in a wealth of unheard Moore material.

WOLF ALICE
The Last Man On Earth

The first single from the UK rockers' highly anticipated third album again demonstrates why they're one of the country's best bands. The *Sgt Pepper's*-esque phased riffs are a welcome new wrinkle.

DINOSAUR JR
I Ran Away

Released in anticipation of new album *Sweep It Into Space*, *I Ran Away* sees J Mascis echoing Neil Young – if Young had diverted his efforts into writing songs to skateboard to, man.



GUIDED BY VOICES
Free Agents

Part of a forthcoming "collage of rejected songs" that the indie-rock legends have reworked to fit the narrative of a stage production, this is a punchy track packed with motorik drums and scuzzy riffs.

REAL ESTATE
Half A Human

Made up of tracks written at the same time as 2020 album *The Main Thing*, Real Estate's new EP is replete with exquisite harmonised guitars reminiscent of the Allman Brothers.

GEORGE GLEW
Satellites

Taken from singer-songwriter Glew's latest EP, this single features a sweet reverb-drenched arpeggiated riff that holds up his exemplary vocals, and quickly grows into an emotional showpiece.

ST VINCENT
Pay Your Way In Pain

Annie Clark's latest creative left-turn sees the guitarist blend honky-tonk pianos and squelching synths with menacing Prince-like stabs on the first single from forthcoming album *Daddy's Home*.

KINGS OF LEON
Golden Restless Age

The family band returned to form with their eighth album, using analogue methods and vintage synths. Its standout track sees Matthew Followill's Epiphone Wilshire delivering some of its best riffs in years.

TWO DAY COMA
Not Exactly

The Bristolian folk-pop trio recently announced their second full-length. Its lead single is a sombre ode to recovery and growth, and is full of lilting guitars and tender bass melodies.

DO NOTHING
Rolex

Continuing the effervescent trend of young indie bands drawing from the work of Talking Heads, Do Nothing's *Rolex* is laden with angular riffery and lyricism akin to that of LCD Soundsystem.

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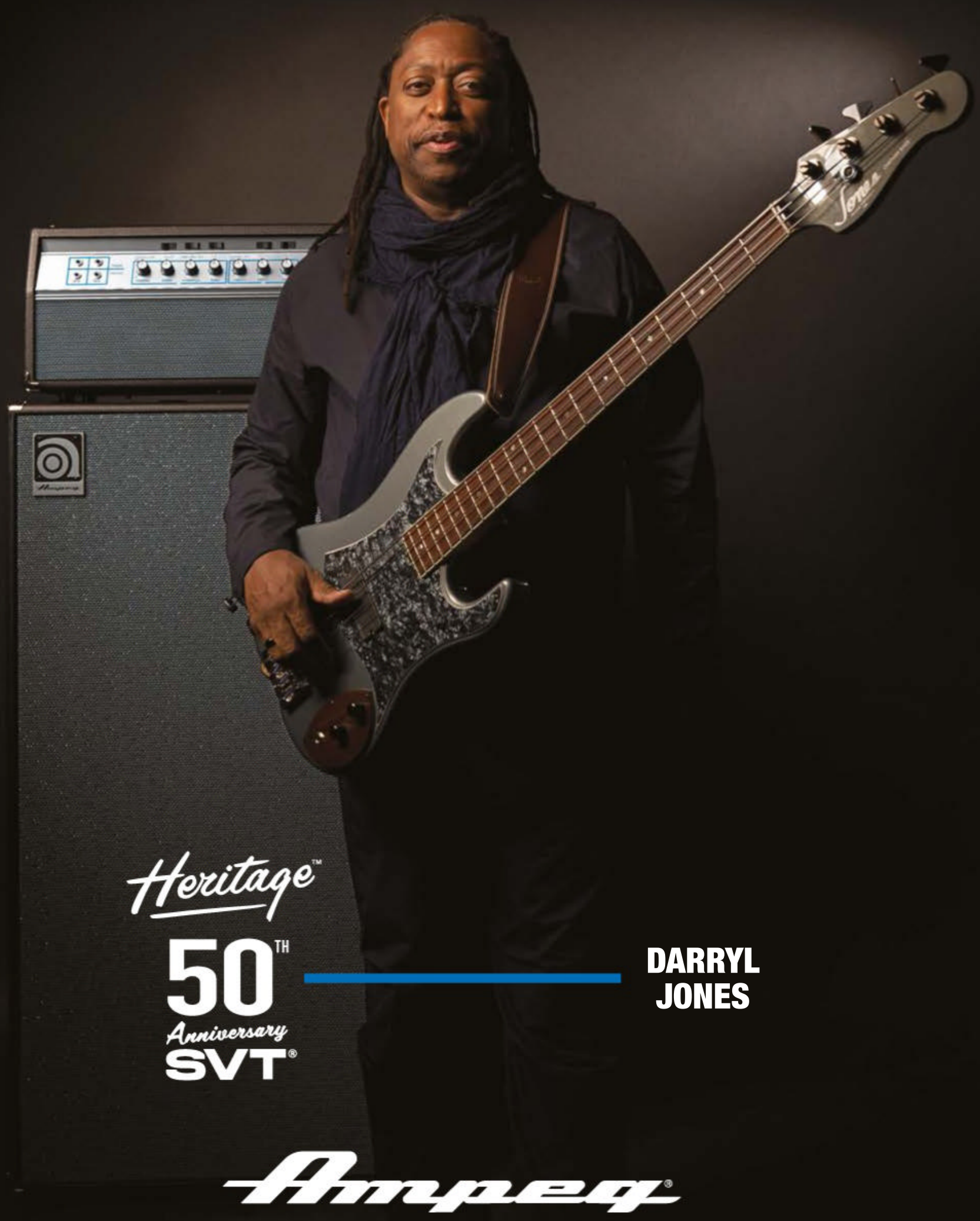

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THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

TAME IMPALA

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

In the decade since Tame Impala's debut album was born in a beach shack in Western Australia, Kevin Parker's psychedelic rock project has grown into a festival-headlining, Grammy-nominated behemoth. But back then it was just about a man, his guitar and the Indian Ocean. Here, Parker reflects on a seminal record, discusses his approach to making "disorienting" guitar parts and his love for Hank Marvin, and tells us why he will never replace his pedals with plugins…

"It was really moving. I didn't expect it to be." Kevin Parker is reflecting on his recent return to Tame Impala's 2010 debut LP, *InnerSpeaker*, for its new 10th-anniversary reissue boxset, and the emotions that come to the fore when you crack the amber on a formative moment in your life.

"I actually found the 16-track recorder that I recorded it on, which I hadn't bothered to pull out of its box for 10 years," Parker tells us on an early morning Zoom call from his home in Australia. "I'd kind of assumed that the hard drive had shat itself, y'know? I didn't expect it to work. But it just turned on and all the songs were there. I started listening to all the sessions in the order I'd been working on them in the house 10 years ago and it just reminded me of so much more than just the songs themselves. It's a snapshot of who I was then. So much has happened since, I've kind of forgotten what it felt like to be a wide-eyed kid, unsure of who he is, trying to prove himself through music."

Joined for live performances by his mates Dominic Simper and Jay Watson, Parker had been performing and recording as Tame Impala for a couple of years by this point. But he had just a self-titled EP of his bedroom recordings to show for his deal with Aussie label Modular Recordings. That was about to change, as Parker decamped with his gear to a beach house with the aim of emerging with his first real statement as an artist. It was no small amount of pressure for a young man whose previous recording experience had been on a much smaller scale.

"I was approaching it like, 'How am I going to do this?! Holy shit, I have to make an album!'" he says. "I can't overstate how much *that* was the feeling. Because up until that point, I had only made solo recordings of myself in my bedroom. I'd been signed to a record label but I'd just made songs with a pair of headphones. I was daunted by the whole task of having to make an album that was then going to be marketed and sold to the public, and money was meant to be made off it!"

Having to craft an entire album on your own, playing pretty much every note and beat of the thing yourself, would be pretty daunting for many artists. But for Kevin, the opposite was true; at this point, Tame Impala was being presented as a 'band' in the traditional sense, as opposed to a solo endeavour with a fixed live band, and that weighed on him.

"I felt there was a pressure on me to make it more of a 'band' album," he reflects. "Just because the machine of the music industry had put us in that box, so that's what I felt people were expecting. Also, Jay and Dom are my two best friends and I felt responsible, in a way, for it to be fulfilling for them too, not just for myself. So that was a difficult thing. I didn't want them to feel like they were just waiting in the wings while I made this album.

© Neil Krug

Tame Impala's live line-up in the *InnerSpeaker* era: Dominic Simpler, Nick Allbrook, Kevin Parker and Jay Watson

"I'VE ALWAYS GOTTEN A KICK OUT OF DISORIENTATING PEOPLE AS TO WHAT KIND OF SOUND THEY'RE LISTENING TO"

"But the 'me recording' bit was bread and butter, because I'd spent so many years, since I was a kid, making music on my own. Making music on my own is and always has been easier than making it with other people – a hundred times easier. Because if I'm playing or writing a guitar riff, I hear the drums in my head and just play them. It takes out an entire section of communicating it to someone."

HOUSE OF FUN

In the lore of *InnerSpeaker*, the recording location has become a kind of character in itself. Wave House is a beach shack that overlooks Western Australia's Injidup Beach, offering stunning 180-degree views of the Indian Ocean, but no internet, phone or television. Even electricity wasn't a given. It's a place that clearly means a lot to Parker (he reportedly bought the property in 2020), as the place Tame Impala emerged from its larval state.

"It's funny because it's so intrinsically linked with the music," he says. "When I listen to *InnerSpeaker* now, I just hear the sound through those walls. I can hear the drum reverb in those walls. But it wasn't meant to be that way. The record label was asking which studio I wanted to record in and I said that I just wanted a shack by the beach. My manager happened to know someone a few hours south from Perth, which is where I live, and that's how we found the house.

"I'm the type of person that hates to say, like, 'Oh, the scenery informed the music'. I hate to think that you need beautiful scenery or a beautiful environment to make music, because up until that point I'd made majestic psych-rock in a shitty shared house, in my shitty room with a pair of headphones, you know? It wasn't like, 'Oh, now I can make some beautiful music!' I'm never one to say it informed the music but, you know, it probably did a little bit. Because when you're staring at a beautiful ocean, anything you play is going to sound beautiful, and so it makes it easier to go, 'This song is finished'."

As anyone who has written and recorded a song will tell you, the hardest part is knowing when to let go. It's interesting, then, that for the 10th-anniversary boxset,

"ABOUT 99 PER CENT OF THE GUITAR ON *INNERSPEAKER* IS FENDER STRAT. I BOUGHT IT OFF A FRIEND. IT WAS MY TOURING STRAT AT THE TIME – IT WAS MY *ONLY* GUITAR AT THE TIME"

Parker decided to include remixes of tracks *Alter Ego* and *Runway Houses City Clouds*. Was this simply a more experienced and confident Parker wanting to take a fresh look at things or was there something about the mixes on those tracks that had been bugging him for the past decade?

"I was happy with how it sounded," he says. "I mean I was a *fucking headcase* by the end of the mixing sessions and [mixer and Mercury Rev bassist] Dave Fridmann was so good at managing me. Every artist knows the torment of finishing an album – and it can just be the pits. I'd been listening to the songs every day for however many months and you lose all objectivity. It's completely out the window.

"With *Alter Ego* especially, I had a vision for the song that I just wasn't able to capture sonically. The way that song is, it's actually kind of charming to me because it's this guitar-playing psych-rocker trying to make music that he thinks sounds like The Chemical Brothers. But I was just using the tools that I had. There were just a few things sonically that I wanted to bring out to trigger an alternative listening experience."

TOOLS AT HAND

One of the most rewarding things about listening to *InnerSpeaker* is the myriad ways in which Parker mangles and twists his guitar to sound like the many other instruments he wished he had on hand to help create the record's dreamlike psychedelic soundscapes. In fact, while listening back to the album today, there are times when you'll be hard-pushed to tell exactly what it is you're hearing.

"I've always gotten a bit of a kick out of disorientating people as to what kind of a sound they're listening to," he says. "It's like a trick, you know? It's the same kind of a thing a magician gets out of making people go, 'Woah, what the fuck?' It's probably similar to the appeal of psychedelic music, that disorientation.

"Also, even though I've always appreciated lots of different types of music, back then, aside from drums and bass, guitar was my everything. So if I wanted an organ sound, I had to try and make a guitar sound like an organ. I'd take the attack off, roll the tone knob back, play with my fingers rather than a pick. I had to do things like that because I didn't own any keyboards or synthesisers. But I also liked the idea that I *could* do it without synths, y'know? I was young enough to be that stuck up and closed-minded that I was like, 'Oh no, I don't use synthesisers, I use guitars to makes synth sounds'. I was *that* age."

What's even more impressive is that all of the weird and wonderful sounds – of guitars disguised as organs and masquerading as synths – were created primarily on a single instrument.

"About 99 per cent of the guitar on that album is Fender Strat," says Parker. "I bought it off a friend. It was my touring Strat at the time – it was my *only* guitar at the time. Those were the days I only really owned one guitar at a time: 'Want a new guitar? I guess I'm selling my guitar.'

"So it was a combination of my live rig, which is an AC30 and a handful of pedals, and recording guitar straight into my eight-track because it had all these presets that I would fuck with. I didn't even know what I was doing. A lot of sounds on that album are directly from my eight-track – I've gone into the parameters and just spun the wheel. You go to the EQ section and you're just like: 'I'll turn some of that up, see what it sounds like… nope, that sounds bad. Go to the next one and just turn that up… that sounds pretty good.' There's a guitar sound that we called 'space guitar'. It's a lead sound that sounds like an octave-shifted guitar. It's very digital and synthetic but I love that. That was just me messing around with presets and parameters. I didn't even know what they did."

HANK MARVELLING

So how does a young musician with a passion for electronic sounds end up making them with guitar in the first place? The answer involves the unexpected influence of another player who knew how to create atmospheric soundscapes in his day.

"My dad played guitar daily and was obsessed with The Shadows and with Hank Marvin," says Parker of how he came to the guitar. "Drums were my first instrument but that didn't really do him any good when he wanted to play Shadow's leads.

ABOVE In the early days, Parker was conscious that Tame Impala were being depicted as a band, rather than a solo endeavour

OPPOSITE Allbrook and Parker, Strat in hand, performing at Melbourne's Hisense Arena in 2009

So I basically started playing by learning the rhythm guitar to Shadows songs. To this day, I think that's why I have a really good sense of rhythm when it comes to playing guitar. I'd also look up guitar tabs on the internet, like Silverchair songs. Discovering tabs was a huge development for me as a kid. It took guitar from this thing that I just played with my dad to like, 'Holy shit I can suddenly play all my favourite songs'. Since then, guitar became my main thing."

Upon expanding his repertoire, Parker's interest in playing music transformed into a burning need to create music of his own.

"I've always liked making new things," he says. "Whether it's drawing pictures or playing with Lego or whatever, making something new has always been the peak of doing anything. Making something new with that skill is the pinnacle of doing it, you know? So immediately, as soon as I played music, it was like, 'Oh, I'm going to write a song'.

BET ON 'BACKER

Kevin's first recordings as Tame Impala might have been predominantly made using a Stratocaster but, shortly after he finished those initial beach house sessions, he took a trip to Japan and met the 1967 Rickenbacker 335 that would become his calling card. Rickys are, it's safe to say, an acquired taste in terms of playability and sound, but for Parker, that's the point.

"It just sounds like no other guitar," he insists. "There's just something about the 'tonk' or the 'honk' or whatever you want to call it. It's funny because I never knew people didn't like playing Rickys but, ever since I've been touring with that guitar, no-one else will pick it up. Anytime anyone picks up my guitar, they're just like, 'Oh fuck this! It feels like rubber bands! It feels like a toy!'

"And it's true. I never shred on that guitar, it's really hard to do solos on, but it just has a sound. The sound

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ABOVE Tame Impala's current live line-up, left to right: Julien Barbagallo, Cam Avery, Parker, Watson, Simper

OPPOSITE Parker on stage with his prized 1967 Rickenbacker 335 at Latitude Festival in 2014

"THE SOUND OF MY RICKENBACKER MAKES ME DREAM. IT'S JUST EVOCATIVE. I CAN'T DECIDE IF IT'S BECAUSE OF BEATLES MUSIC OR JUST BECAUSE IT SOUNDS DIFFERENT – STRUMMING ON A RICKENBACKER IS JUST A DIFFERENT FEELING ALTOGETHER"

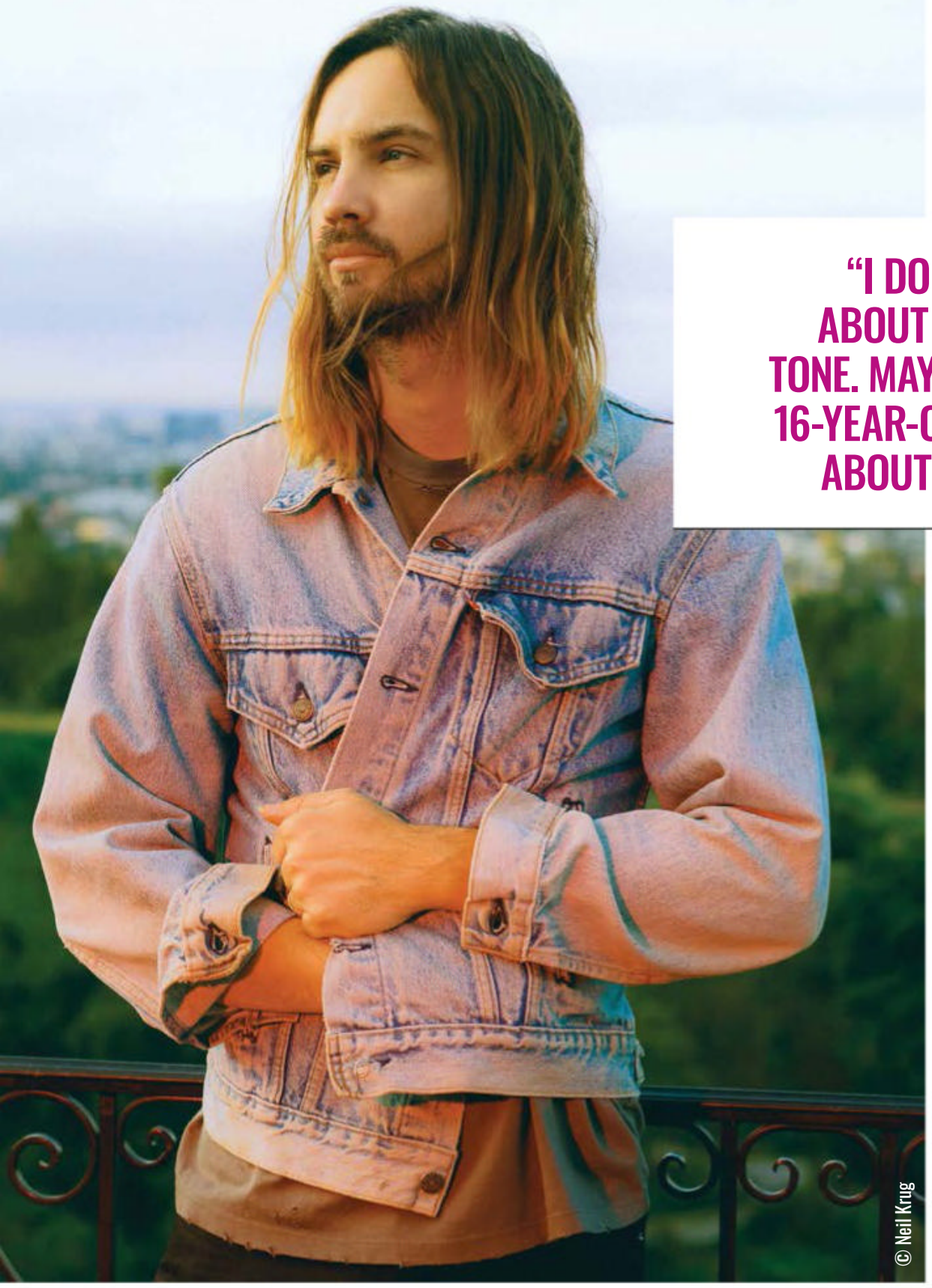
of it makes me dream. It's just evocative. I can't decide if it's because of Beatles music or just because it sounds different – I don't know how to describe it. Strumming on a Rickenbacker is just a different feeling altogether."

Over the years, Parker has added a few other Rickys to help share the load with the '67 while on tour. That old mongrel Strat is still around too, as well as a few other bits and pieces. But it's safe to say that Parker is not a man sitting on a huge collection of vintage gear.

"Put it this way, I don't have any guitars that I haven't used on stage," he says, with a laugh. "If you tally up all the pictures of me on the internet playing different guitars, that's how many guitars I have. I'm not a 'collector'. I'm not like, 'Oh I really want a 1959 Strat,' y'know? If I have something that sounds like that, it's good enough for me."

He might not be obsessing over serial numbers and Bakelite knobs any time soon, then. But Parker is always on the lookout for something a little different, something that, to his mind, offers qualities that you can't get from more famous guitars.

"I bought a blue Teisco – I don't know the model, super-cheap. But it sounds completely different," he says. "If you play like some Nile Rodgers funk guitar on the top three strings, it just has a vibe. It sounds like you're listening to some forgotten album, which I just don't think you can get from the classic guitars.



OPPOSITE Parker at Lollapalooza in 2019, playing something else from his modest collection: a Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster

The thing about playing a Les Paul is that it sounds like every album that has been made with a Les Paul. It's so much harder to get a unique sound. It's just about having a footprint – the Rickenbacker has a footprint, the Teisco has a footprint."

TAMED IMPALA

When it comes to making music in the studio, however, it's yet another leftfield instrument choice that Parker reaches for more often than not – and for a very utilitarian reason.

"I bought a Hagstrom Impala at Chicago Music Exchange," he says. "Jay said, 'Hey, Kevin, there's a guitar over here called an Impala'. We were on tour and I think maybe we'd just started to make some money or something, so I was like, 'Fuck yeah, I'm gonna buy it'. Then Hagstrom ended up reissuing the Impala and they sent me a couple. I just love how it's all switches. There's a treble boost and the tones, but it's all switches except for the volume. I've grown to love that in the studio because it means the settings are always really easily recalled. So if you record a part and you want to go back and record something as an alternative take months later, you can do that, because it's a combination of six switches."

"I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT I FEEL WEIRD ABOUT USING PLUGINS TO GET A GUITAR TONE. MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I FEEL MY INNER 16-YEAR-OLD SCREAMING! BUT SOMETHING ABOUT IT GIVES ME THE HEEBIE-JEEBIES"

Parker's Impala switch-flicking is an interesting window into how he approaches the instrument when recording, and an important lesson on what 'good tone' really is.

"It sounds terrible," he says. "But I hardly ever think to myself, 'Okay, I'm gonna record this guitar part, what guitar am I going to use?' I always just use the closest guitar to me. I'll play it, get a good sound on it and *that's* the guitar sound. After that, I can't imagine the guitar part being any other sound. But it was literally just the guitar sitting next to me, because by the time I've had time to think about the sound, I've recorded it and moved on. For me, making songs is kind of like that: I just wanna get it down before I forget it or before I fall out of love with the idea."

PULLING THE PLUG

Given that Parker's last album, 2020's *The Slow Rush* was an almost entirely electronic record, it's surprising to hear him recoil when we ask about the increasingly common use of plugins, amp sims and other digital marvels to record guitar.

"I don't know why, but I feel weird about using plugins to get a guitar tone," he says. "Maybe it's because I feel my inner 16-year-old screaming! I'm not one of those people that will record a guitar completely clean into a nice preamp, no clipping, into the computer, and then sculpt the tone there. Something about that gives me the heebie-jeebies. Maybe it's because it's like you've got too much time to consider the sound.

"Guitar tone is one of those things that I like to lock in there and then, and then that's the sound. The sound is so linked to the guitar part, possibly more so than any other instrument. The most famous and the most classic guitar riffs of all time wouldn't be those riffs if they didn't have *that* sound. And plugins are plugins, y'know? I'm just kind of ehh, it's all about pedals."

Speaking of which, we're intrigued to see how his setup has evolved in that regard since the first time he went down to the Wave House in 2009.

"I still have my Seymour Duncan KTG-1 Preamp, which is kind of my go-to," he says. "I almost don't bother recording guitar unless I've got that nearby, because it's instant mojo. I don't know what it is – it sounds like I'm listening to an album. I think that can sum up a lot of my tone searching and guitar playing: 'Does it sound like I'm playing on an album?'

© Tim Mosenfelder / Getty Images

"I actually still use a lot of the same pedals that I always have: the Boss Blues Driver, the MXR Dyna Comp, the Holy Grail – I can't imagine using a different reverb and it's been 10 years now. I also love the Roland Guitar Synthesizer, you can get some wild stuff out of those things."

HOMEWARD BOUND

In many ways, it seems that Parker has stayed true to the gear and ethos that best served him when he was making music in his bedroom and ridden it all the way to headlining Coachella and beyond. But, having taken some time to revisit *InnerSpeaker*, he has been reminded how much has changed since those heady days on Injidup Beach – and how much hasn't…

"If you could go back and see a day in your life 10 years ago, it'd tell you so much that memories forget," says Parker. "There are these recordings of us talking, me and Dom. I'd have friends come to visit because the house was so nice and sometimes I'd hit record while we were just goofing around, and I can hear myself talking and I remember thinking how socially awkward I was, not that I'm David Letterman now… I just never realised how much I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it, y'know? Music was everything to me – and still is – but in terms of feeling good about myself, music was everything back then. And that's what I remember."

Tame Impala's *InnerSpeaker* 10th-anniversary boxset is available now on Modular Recordings

MARCH

A NOD IS

WORDS GARY WALKER
PHOTOGRAPHY DONALD MILNE

Unlike many of their 1990s alternative peers, Teenage Fanclub burned bright but never burned out. Now, 35 years into a career that spans 11 studio albums, we ask guitarists Raymond McGinley and Norman Blake to take stock, as they talk cheap offsets, touring with Nirvana and Radiohead, and why they're feeling stronger than ever

"We've been buying guitars and amps for years," says Teenage Fanclub's Raymond McGinley, relaxing in his Glasgow home on the eve of the release of the band's 10th studio album *Endless Arcade*. "But we always end up coming back to those first things we bought. We were lucky to get it right 35 years ago!"

Lucky feels like a colossal understatement when you look over the inventory of gear that the band picked up during their formative years and that they continue to use to this day. Rising from the mix on *Endless Arcade* – the band's first album since 2016's UK Top 10 hit *Here* – is a mouth-watering array of vintage equipment: two early 1960s Fender Jaguars, a 1950s Tweed Fender Deluxe, an early 1960s Epiphone Casino, a 1970 Gibson ES-335, a couple of delectable Martins and a 1950s Guild acoustic. The whole lot was acquired for what can only be described as peanuts, back in the halcyon days when vintage Fender offsets could be picked up for less than £300. Today, you'd consider yourself to have bagged a bargain if you paid 10 times that.

"I've had two main guitars all the way through Teenage Fanclub," says McGinley. "One of them I bought in 1983 from the Guitar Player shop in Rochdale, a sunburst 1963 Fender Jaguar. It was £265 and it's still my main guitar. A couple of years later, I bought the Casino for £300 from some guy in the local classifieds.

"I had this Fender Twin that Primal Scream were going to buy off me for £300, so I took everyone's rent money from the flat I was in and bought the Casino. Then Primal Scream reneged on the deal and I was left in a hole for £300. I can't remember what I did but I didn't eat much for a few weeks. Norman didn't have an electric, so he used the Casino and I used the Jaguar. I love that I got one of those guitars when I was a student and the other when I was on the dole and they're Teenage Fanclub's two main guitars to this day."

McGinley, the idiosyncratic lead guitarist to Blake's reliable rhythm man, loved that '63 sunburst so much that he went in search of a second Jaguar, landing a 1964 Fiesta Red example from a shop in Boston, Massachusetts in 1992. Ask him what he likes about the tone of Fender's revered short-scale offset, though, and he struggles – because his have little in common.

"They feel completely different," he says. "The necks are completely different and they sound completely different. I think there's something wrong with one of the pickups on the sunburst Jaguar too – it sounds broken, but I use it with both pickups together. The neck is fat and there's a tiny bit of the bridge that you can hardly hear because it doesn't work properly. But that's the sound of that guitar."

Blake enjoyed similar good fortune on the band's gear-hunting adventures in the US. "Predominantly, I've played a 1970 335, which we picked up for a few hundred dollars in a shop in Cleveland, Ohio in 1991 or 1992," he says. "The guy went down to the basement and there it was, virtually unplayed with flatwound strings and this curly lead that had been in the case so long it had left a tiny indentation in the lacquer. We paid $300 and it's the guitar I've played all these years."

BOYS DONE GOOD

Blake and McGinley formed Teenage Fanclub with bassist Gerard Love and drummer Francis Macdonald in 1989 after the guitarists had played together in Glasgow band the Boy Hairdressers. After the raw noise of their debut *A Catholic Education* and its largely improvised follow-up *The King*, they struck gold in 1991 with the release of *Bandwagonesque*.

Raymond McGinley (left), Norman Blake (centre) and Gerard Love on stage in the early 1990s

© Martyn Goodacre / Getty Images

Fusing the serrated edge of the nascent grunge scene with hazy West Coast jangle and three-part harmonies absorbed from The Beach Boys, Big Star and The Byrds, it began a run of imperious releases on Alan McGee and Dick Green's Creation Records. *Bandwagonesque* was followed by *Thirteen* in 1993, *Grand Prix* in 1995 and *Songs From Northern Britain* in 1997. By the time they wrapped up the *Endless Arcade* sessions last March, they were celebrating three decades and 11 albums as Teenage Fanclub.

"We've just never stopped," says McGinley, trying to explain their longevity. "This thing is our life and we don't know anything else. We like making records and touring and we never really saw the need to stop and second guess anything."

Endless Arcade begins with quite an opening salvo. McGinley delivers an immaculately phrased melodic solo that winds through seven-minute opener *Home*, Blake's wistful reflection on his return to Scotland after 10 years in Canada. The album is unmistakably Teenage Fanclub, yet through a kind of weathered and bittersweet lens, as songs such as *Back In The Day* and *In Our Dreams* find them reaching back to their salad days. The title track's hopeful mantra, "Don't be afraid of this endless arcade that is life", written long before COVID-19 struck, became an accidental thread to hold onto in these troubled times.

With Love departing in 2018, long-time member Dave McGowan switched to bass and touring keyboardist Euros Childs joined the sessions at Hamburg's Clouds Hill Studio, overlooking the Elbe River. As ever, the band tracked live, vintage instruments allowed to trespass into each other's sonic space and spontaneity encouraged. "We tend to set up in the same room. We don't worry too much about spill," says Blake. "We like to play in the same space, looking at each other, and there's nothing wrong with a bit of spill anyway."

“NEITHER OF US ARE MUSOS. CREATING A CHORD BETWEEN US, THE SHAPES HE AND I MAKE ADD UP TO SOMETHING BIGGER. WE DON’T REALLY THINK ABOUT IT. THE BLEND OF ME AND HIM JUST SOUNDS LIKE THE BAND”

1 This sunburst ’63 Jaguar cost McGinley a mere £265 back in 1983

2 McGinley used his housemates’ rent money to buy this vintage Casino for £300 in the mid-1980s

3 Blake’s Martin 000-28 is signed by influential lo-fi singer-songwriter and visual artist Daniel Johnston, who died in 2019

4 This mid-1970s Fender Vibro Champ shows the scars of a life on the road

5 There’s no messing with this modified 1970s Gibson SG I

While the band’s rhythm guitarist alternated between a Martin 000-28 and his 335 into a cranked mid-70s Fender Champ, there were also appearances from a Fender Electric XII, an old workhorse Tele, a Martin D12-35 and a Jaggard acoustic bought for £60 in Nagoya. McGinley’s studio amp was another bargain picked up while trawling the dusty guitar shops of the US, his late-1950s Tweed Deluxe.

“It’s like the one Neil Young uses,” he says. “We were on tour and they were talking about hiring amps. I hate renting things. Luke Wood at Geffen took me to The Amp Shop in Reseda, California. It was wall to wall vintage Fenders. I bought the Deluxe, a 1950s Bassman and a brown Princeton. The Casino and the Deluxe together sound amazing. You can have a really chimey, ringing clean sound or turn it up and it goes into proper creamy distortion. The tweed’s ripped off on one side because my cat used it as a scratching post. It looks completely wrecked but it sounds amazing.”

Sharpened by 30 years and hundreds of live excursions, the near-telepathic blend between the two players has never been more evident than on *Endless Arcade*. Charmingly modest, McGinley says: “Neither of us are musos. Creating a chord between us, the shapes he and I make add up to something bigger, and we don’t really think about it. The blend of me and him just sounds like the band: you’re down there, I’ll do something up here; you’re playing that shape, I’ll play different notes; you’re playing that rhythm, I’ll do something against that…”

Blake, who penned the bulk of the band’s early material before they began to share writing duties, is full of praise for his lead guitarist. “He’s got an idiosyncratic style and, in terms of solos, he’ll always come from leftfield and do something you don’t expect. If I’ve written a song, I won’t even attempt a solo. I leave his parts to him, because he’ll come up with something way more interesting than I could.”

THE CLASS OF ’91

Alongside releasing their 11th album, 2021 has afforded an opportunity for Blake and McGinley to reflect on the 30th anniversary of *Bandwagonesque*, a record that changed everything for Teenage Fanclub.

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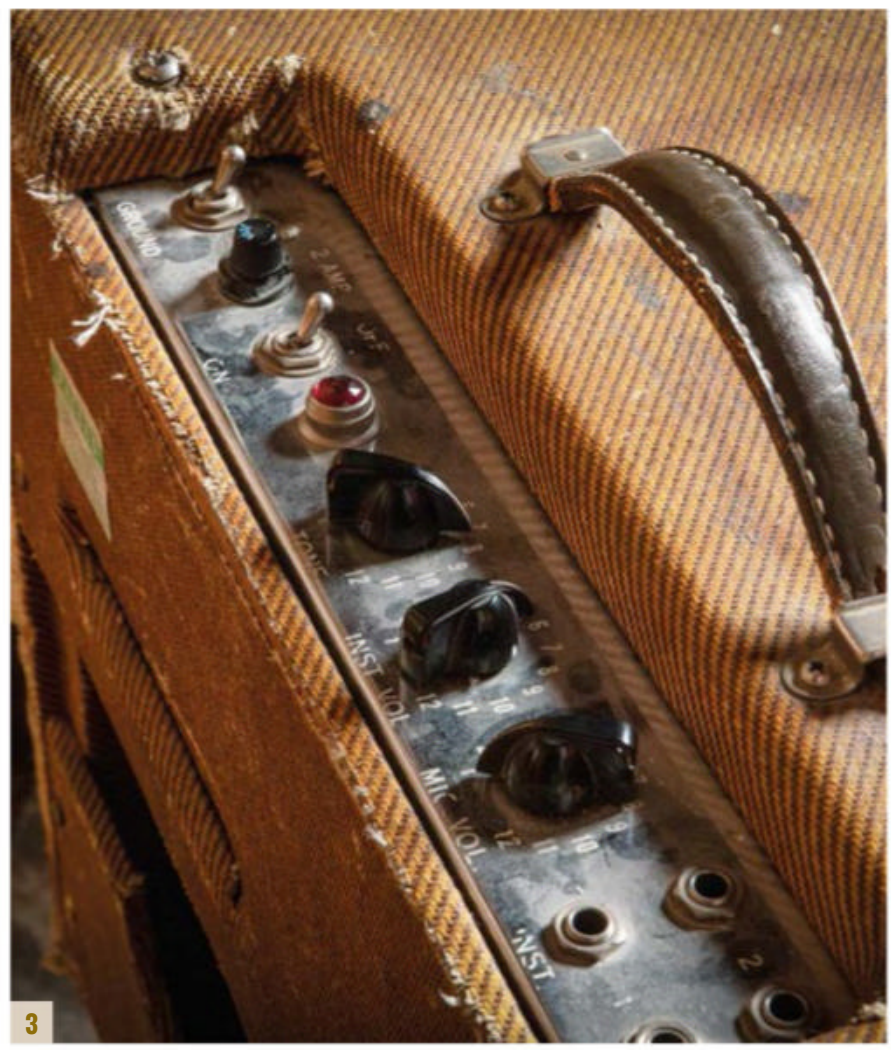

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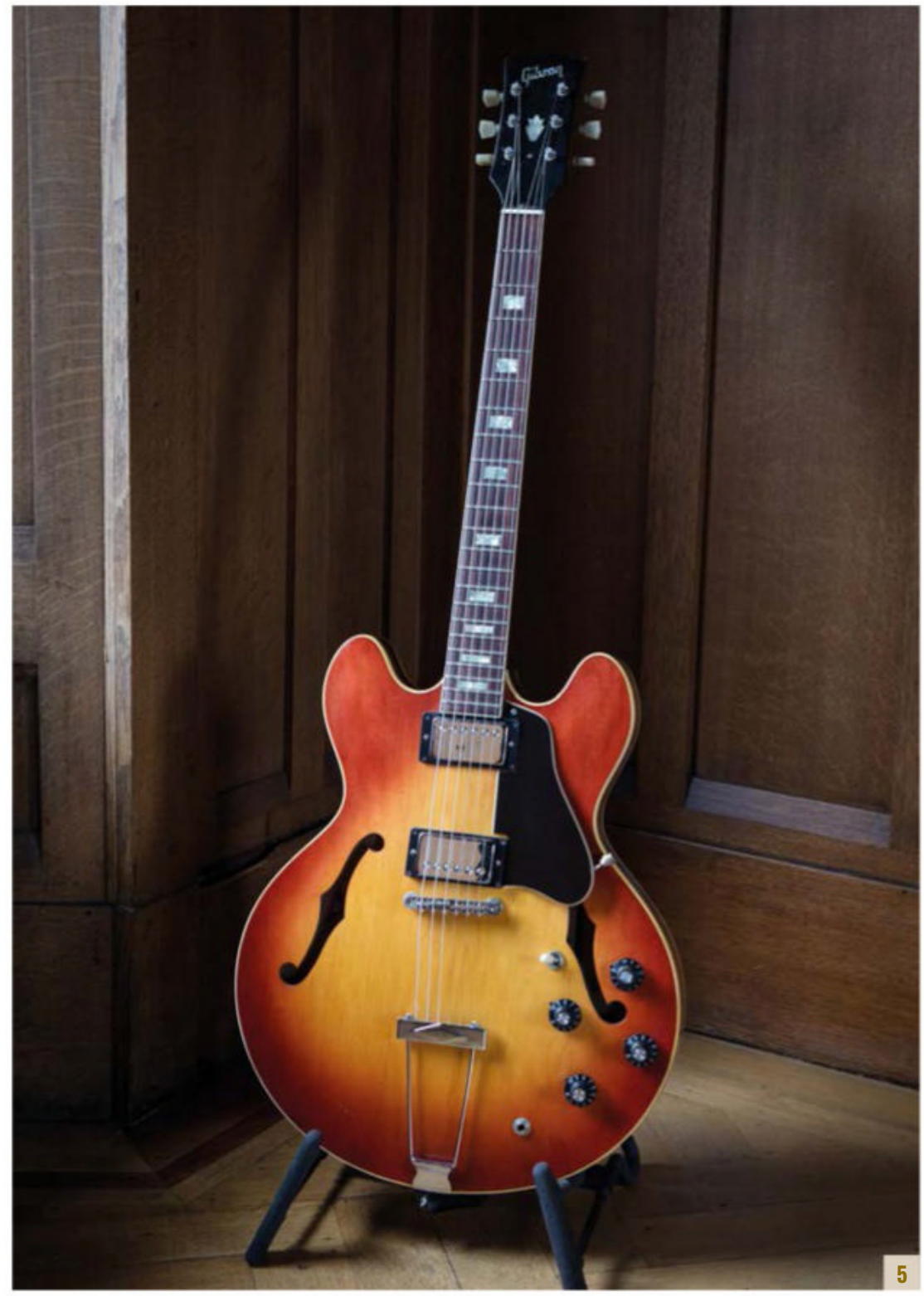

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The album was released during a richly fertile year that also spawned REM's *Out Of Time* and My Bloody Valentine's murky masterpiece *Loveless*, while Nirvana rolled a hand grenade into a stale musical landscape in the shape of *Nevermind*. The Glaswegians were invited on the European leg of the latter album's tour. "It was an incredible experience," says Blake. "You were witnessing a phenomenon and we got to do it again a few years later when we toured the US with Radiohead on *OK Computer*, another phenomenon, this album just exploding. The reaction of the audience was incredible, not something that happens very often, and we got to see it twice."

Blake is typically humble in assessing his album's legacy. "You don't listen to your own records that often," he says. "I've always said it's masochistic. But *Bandwagonesque* holds up after all these years. I'm pretty pleased with what we did on that record."

"It was the first record where we had a bit of time to do what we wanted in the studio," says McGinley. "There was no expectation on us. It felt like we were in our own little world, creating this thing. Whenever we make a record, we try to get back to that feeling of being off in our own little world."

"THEY JUST GAVE US MONEY AND LET US DO WHAT WE WANTED. NOBODY GAVE US A HARD TIME ABOUT ANYTHING. THEY BET THEIR LIVES ON THE MADNESS AND WHIMS OF MUSICIANS"

The pair may be modest to a fault about an album of startling melodic refinement, but it remains as potent today as it was 30 years ago. Listen back to sensational six-minute opener *The Concept*; jagged, saturated chords unfurl from Blake's Casino as McGinley rips through a pair of hair-raising solos, illuminated by huge electrifying bends. It's just about as good as guitar music gets.

"I used the '63 Jaguar," says McGinley, "and a great amp – a copy of a Mesa/Boogie called a Mesia. I used it quite a bit until, at some point during the sessions, it caught fire. With that Jaguar, when you bend notes, there's no hint of metal or rock. It sounds really sweet. I don't know what it is, it just sounds so sweet. That Jaguar, at the end of *The Concept*, it just makes sense."

The album, which peaked at No. 22 in the UK and saw Kurt Cobain call Teenage Fanclub "the best band in the world", was one of five released on Creation.

1 Blake's well-worn Fender Musicmaster is a trusted studio and live companion

2 This 50s Guild could tell a few stories

3 McGinley's cat-scratched 5E3 Deluxe has long been a staple of the Teenage Fanclub sound

4 McGinley got this '64 Fiesta Red Jaguar in Boston for peanuts on tour in the 90s

5 Blake bought this 1970 ES-335 in Cleveland for next to nothing, too

Blake holding his 1970 ES-335, while McGinley clings to his long-serving 1967 Epiphone Casino

McGinley and Blake look back at the label's wild, narcotic heyday fondly, accepting that it could never happen again. "They just gave us money and let us do what we wanted," says McGinley. "Nobody gave us a hard time about anything. They believed and they bet their lives on the madness and whims of musicians."

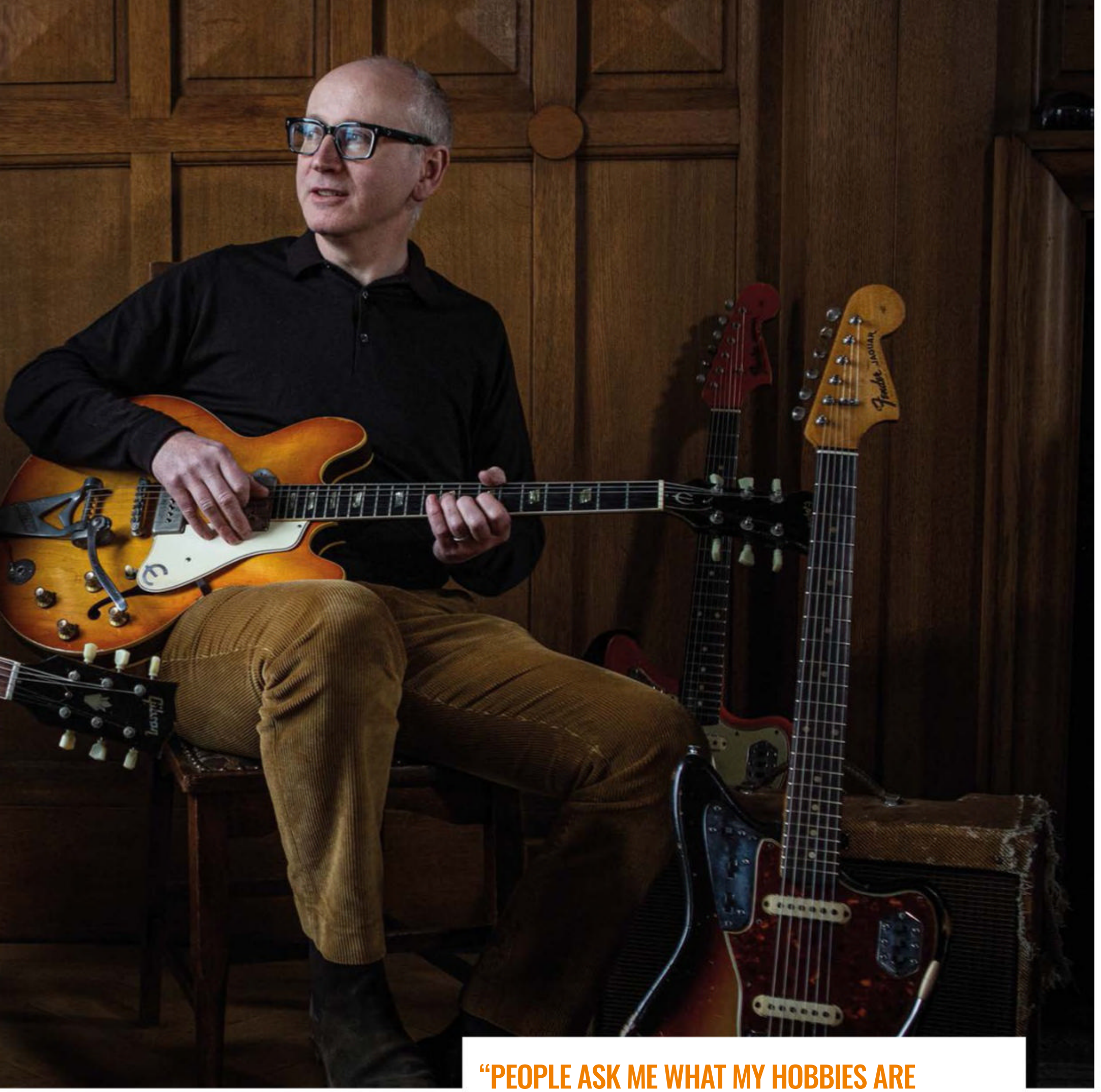
"Alan put his house up as collateral to fund the Valentines' album, ours and *Screamadelica*," says Blake. "Then Oasis came along and took it to another level. They put their money where their mouth was. That's just not going to happen today."

Bandwagonesque is undeniably soaked in the influence of the under-appreciated Big Star and their late frontman Alex Chilton, not least the song *December*, which channels the Memphis band's *September Gurls*. McGinley and Blake played a handful of life-affirming shows with Chilton in 1996 after meeting him in New Orleans.

"He took a shine to us," remembers Blake. "He was a really amazing guitar player. He showed me a chord once and I said, 'That's a great chord, Alex'. He said, 'Yeah, Carl showed me that'. I realised later that he was talking about Carl Wilson from The Beach Boys. He was a really talented guitarist with a very idiosyncratic style and he's really underestimated as a guitar player. Working with him, we learned an awful lot."

WALKING INTO THE FUTURE

It's a frigid February afternoon in Glasgow. Low winter sun is streaming through the window as two of the nicest men in music talk with humility about a career that began in the suburbs of Glasgow and saw them conquer the world. Blake is extolling the virtues of pairing his stock Vox AC15 live, with "the best pedal I've ever bought", an Xotic EP Booster.



> **"PEOPLE ASK ME WHAT MY HOBBIES ARE OUTSIDE OF THE BAND AND I SAY, 'I LIKE GUITARS, I LIKE STUDIOS, I LIKE BUYING RECORDS'. I'M IN MY DREAM JOB"**

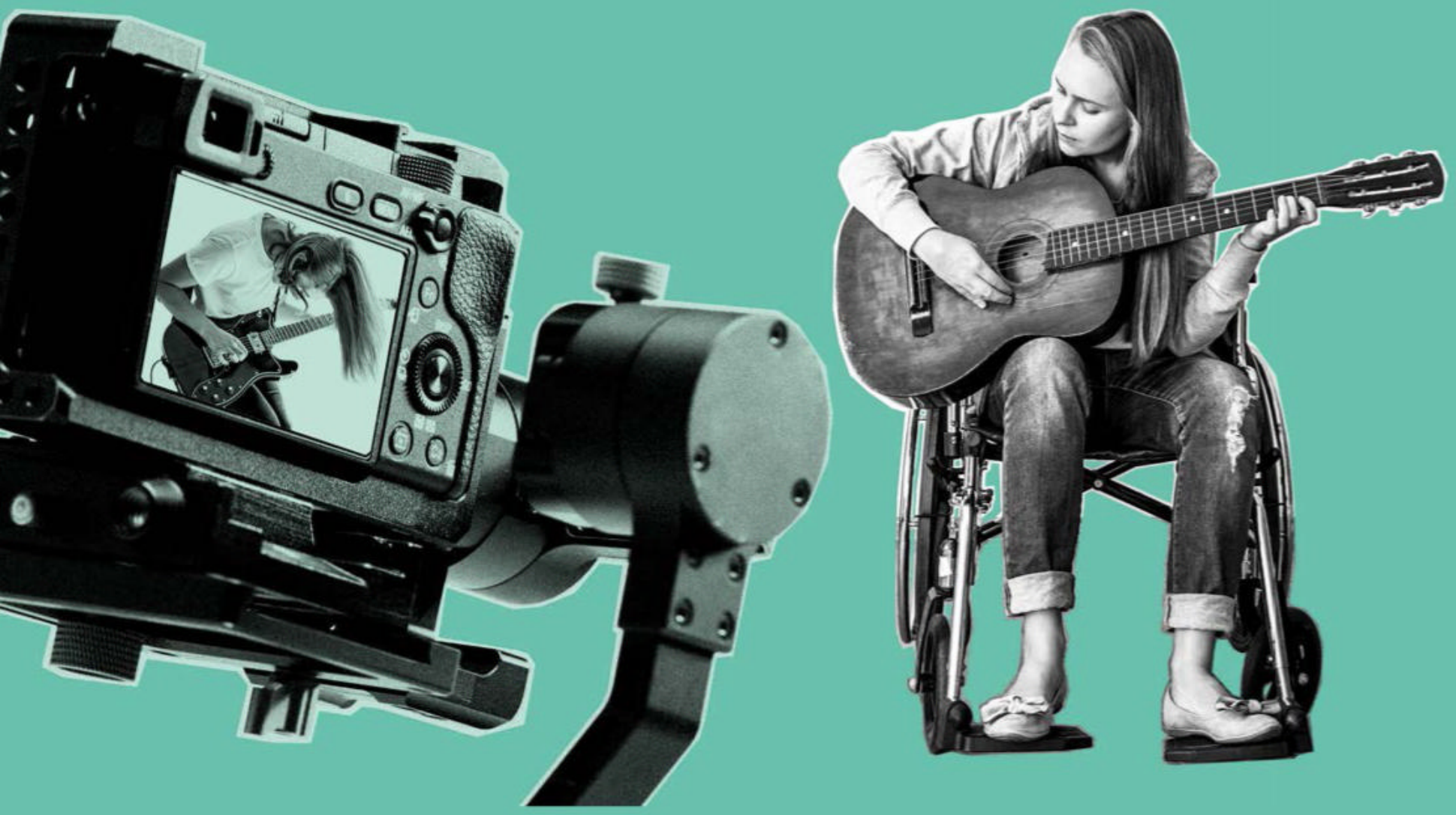
You can tell they're desperate to be out there on the road again. "It's going to be really exciting to go out and play these songs," he says. "We feel very enthused about the band, we're keen to do more recording, we're very keen to go out and play live. It's been over a year since we played a show, or any band played a show, which is insane when you think about it."

It is insane. On *Endless Arcade*'s doleful 10th track, *The Future*, McGinley laments, "It's hard to walk into the future when your shoes are made of lead", and yet Teenage Fanclub are still here, still together after three decades – and still playing those same guitars. Today, McGinley and Blake are feeling stronger than ever as a unit and looking towards that future with renewed optimism. Importantly, they still love being a band, they're grateful for the opportunities they've seized and – here comes that word again – they feel lucky to have built a career on something they love.

"We're lucky to be doing what we do," says Blake. "People ask me what my hobbies are outside of the band and I say, 'I like guitars, I like studios, I like buying records'. I'm in my dream job. I feel fortunate we can still do this and just about make a living from it. We're very lucky we get to make records and go to amazing studios like Clouds Hill. So many friends of mine are back working jobs, and their music has had to take a back seat. We're able to have this as our main thing and that's just incredible."

Teenage Fanclub's *Endless Arcade* is out 30 April on PeMa

HOW TO BE A MODERN GUITARIST



Back in 2019, we proclaimed in these very pages that, despite what some voices in the media were telling us at the time, the guitar was not over. The two years since have proved this beyond a shadow of doubt. In the past year alone, the guitar industry has turned a global pandemic into a record-setting boom, with brands big and small barely able to keep up with the demand, as millions of people turned or returned to the instrument for comfort in these darkest of times. Meanwhile, artists as diverse as H.E.R., Phoebe Bridgers, Machine Gun Kelly and The 1975 continue to demonstrate that the versatility and creativity of the guitar remains undimmed after more than 70 years at the heart of popular music.

But what does it really mean to be a guitarist in 2021? With guitar culture a broader church than ever before, the answer is undeniably difficult to pin down. But the simplest way to find out is to ask. So that's what we did.

Here, we've pulled together nearly two dozen notable names from across the wonderful world of guitar – from Grammy-winning slingers and social media influencers, to boutique builders and up and coming artists – to ask them questions that will hopefully help us get to the bottom of what that grand statement at the top really means.

How do you make your voice heard in the maelstrom of social media? What's great about our industry? Where do we need to improve? What really matters? The guitar, as ever, contains multitudes – but the community we've formed is as vital as ever before. This is what they have to say...

Words: Josh Gardner & Sam Roberts **Illustrations:** Phil Millard

Source images for illustrations © Getty Images and Adobe Stock

MEET THE PANEL

MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS
@puisheen

Not only is Mike a guitar player, guitar tech and guitar educator, he's also a regular columnist for *Guitar Magazine*, and a *Star Trek* obsessive. He is best known for his encyclopedic knowledge of offsets, and for being the purveyor of a mean Lt Cmdr Data cosplay.

RYAN BURKE
@60cyclehum

As the host of the *60 Cycle Hum* podcast and YouTube channel, Ryan covers the buying, selling, trading, fixing, modifying, breaking, reviewing and playing of all manner of guitars, amps and effects.

SOPHIE BURRELL
@sophieburrell1

British player Sophie began making guitar videos at home when she was just 14. Today, the 21-year-old is a PRS endorsee, as well as a popular tutor and guitar influencer. She recently released her debut single, *Tranquility*.

CELISSE HENDERSON
@celissemusic

Celebrated Oakland singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Celisse has appeared in everything from the Broadway national tour of *Wicked*, to TV shows such as *30 Rock* and *The Big C*. She's also performed in concert with the likes of Macy Gray and Mariah Carey. Her single *Freedom* is out now.

MATTHEW HOOPES
@1981inventions

The owner of pedal brand 1981 Inventions, whose DRV remains one of the most sought-after boutique pedals on the market, Matthew is also a founding member of Grammy-nominated US rock band Relient K.

JAY LEONARD J
@jayleonardj

Touring guitarist, session musician and content creator Jay is best known for his popular eponymous YouTube channel, through which the Canadian shares advice on everything from better playing to what pickups to put in your Strat.

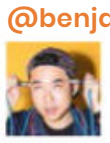
TAREK JAFAR
@ta_rek

One half of Ontario alt-rock duo The Blue Stones, Tarek is a guitarist, vocalist and unabashed Gibson Les Paul lover. Last year, The Blue Stones were nominated for a Juno award for Best Breakthrough Act. Their latest single *Spirit* is out now.

JOEL KORTE
@chaseblissaudio

As the founder of Chase Bliss Audio and the designer of some of the most wildly inventive and forward-thinking effects pedals around, Joel blends analogue circuitry with digital control to unlock new sonic possibilities.

BENJAMIN MAH
@benjaminmah



As a key artist-relations manager at BandLab Technologies, Ben has been heavily involved in the rebirth of two legendary names in guitar gear: Harmony and Teisco. Based in Singapore, Ben is also a session bassist, as well as a bandleader.

RABEA MASSAAD
@rabeaafro

Guitarist and YouTuber Rabea is best known for the demos he does on the Andertons Music channel, as well as for playing in bands Toska, Frog Leap and Dorje. He's a Chapman Guitars and Victory Amps signature artist and his latest album, *Grinding Gears Vol 3*, is out now.

MALENY MIKELS
@malenymikels

Based in Mexico City, Maleny is a guitarist, composer, session musician, and occasional contributor to *Guitar.com*. She's a Music Man and Godin Guitars endorsee, and has recently released her first single, entitled *In Between Worlds*.

DR MOLLY MILLER
@moodymill

A guitar player and tutor from Los Angeles, Dr Molly holds a doctorate of musical arts in guitar performance from USC. She also performs with various acts, including Grammy winner Jason Mraz and her own Molly Miller Trio.

TIANA OHARA
@tianaohara

A touring and session player with the likes of Queen Naija, Niki, Fatai, Charlotte Day Wilson and others, Tiana has performed on *The Late Late Show*, NPR's Tiny Desk Concert series and even Nickelodeon's *All That*.

FILIPE PAMPURI
@beetronics

The owner and founder of Beetronics FX moved from his native Brazil to LA when his band got signed. Seven years later, the group split up and Filipe and his brother turned to making pedals. The rest is bee-istory.

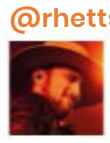
SHELBY POLLARD
@shelbypollard

The former resident offset specialist at Chicago Music Exchange, Shelby is now the proprietor of Black Bobbin, a unique retailer and café based in the Windy City that specialises in batch project partnerships, with exclusive runs of products with carefully chosen brands covering everything from pickups and effects to coffee.

ISAIAH SHARKEY
@sharkey335

Recording artist, producer, writer and educator Isaiah won a Grammy at the age of just 21 for his work on D'Angelo's 2014 album *Black Messiah*. In recent years, Isaiah has also worked as John Mayer's touring guitarist.

RHETT SHULL
@rhettshull

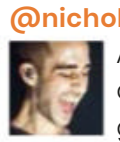


Atlanta-based YouTube host, podcaster and professional guitarist Rhett has built a large online audience on the back of his videos, which take in gear and buying advice, and tours of iconic guitar stores, as well as his Backstage Journal series, which chronicles the highs and lows of life as a touring musician.

LEILA SIDI
@tunatoneinst

Canada's TunaTone guitars has earned a reputation that stretches beyond its home of Edmonton. Founder Leila is a luthier of meticulous skill and craftsmanship, and aims is to build guitars that centre the experience of those rarely prioritised in the guitar industry.

NICHOLAS VEINOGLOU
@nicholasveinoglou



As a touring and session guitarist as well as a musical director and producer based in the City of Angels, Nicholas has been on the road with the likes Bazzi and Jordan Fisher. His e-book *The Working Musicians Handbook* chronicles the things he wishes he knew before he began his own career in the industry. It's out now.

RUBEN WAN
@rubenwan

Originally from Panama, Ruben is a YouTuber, tutor, songwriter and producer now based in Los Angeles. He has a knack for writing and producing memorable and compelling guitar content that does well on social media. His new single *Daydreaming* is out now.

VANESSA WHEELER
@vavaenvivo

A Berklee-educated guitarist, gear expert and composer, Vanessa performs under the name VAVÁ, making music that bridges the gap between pop and traditional Brazilian guitar, as well as the electronica and R&B genres. Her new single *Wild Thing* is out now.

HARRISON WHITFORD
@scarrisonwhitford

A guitarist and songwriter based in LA, Harrison is best known for his collaboration with Phoebe Bridgers. You can hear his inventive lead work across Bridgers' Grammy-nominated 2020 album *Punisher*. He is also the son of Aerosmith guitarist Brad.

YVETTE YOUNG
@yvetteyoung

One of the biggest names in modern instrumental guitar, Yvette is the frontwoman of math-rock band Covet, through which she demonstrates her intense, jaw-dropping two-handed tapping technique, usually with her signature Ibanez YY10 Talman in hand.

PART 1

SOCIAL MEDIA

No matter who you are, it's remarkably tough to exist in the modern world without engaging with social media in some shape or form. With the creator economy – the fancy term for people who make money from creating content for social media – the fastest-growing type of small business on the planet according to a 2020 report by venture capital firm SignalFire, it's no surprise that the guitar industry has its own thriving influencer culture.

Many of our panellists could place themselves in that category (even if they might prefer not to), with substantial online followings that have enabled them to expand the scope and reach of their careers and, in many cases, build an audience that has allowed them to turn their creative passions into their full-time job. Here's what our panel had to say about whether they'd be where they are today without savvy use of social media.

"I've been able to connect with an infinitely larger audience thanks to social media, particularly through collaborating with gear companies and brands such as Pickup Music. I was working before social media really took over but it has definitely helped me to reach more people and ultimately have more opportunities."
DR MOLLY MILLER

"Things would look a lot different without social media. Instagram was actually a major catalyst in my decision to launch a pedal company, in that I already followed and interacted with a lot of pedal companies as a fan. At one point, I realised that a lot of my friends online were pedal builders, and many of them were instrumental in my gaining knowledge and the encouragement to start my own company."
MATTHEW HOOPES

"It's been an extremely powerful tool to connect with others. I am grateful to have gotten gigs through recommendations from people I've met on Instagram, and to even have artists themselves discovering my playing on the platform."
TIANA OHARA

"Our brand pretty much only exists because of social media. Everything started off Instagram."
FILIPE PAMPURI

"These days, it's crucial for artists to engage with their fanbase online. It has brought me tons of great experiences and incredible opportunities. It's definitely the reason I am where I am."
RABEA MASSAAD

"Not unlike a lot of artists, I'm pretty introverted, and putting myself out there via the internet was a good starting point for me to showcase my musical interests, my songwriting ideas, and pedal experimentations without having to pour it all into my personal music and live performances. The sense of community that I have been able to cultivate as a result of that transparency of process has been both lovely to watch grow and fruitful for my career."
VANESSA WHEELER

"I am someone who fervently believes that social media is a tool but *not* a career. Cultivating one's artistry and skill set happens away from the screen. Social media is a marketing tool to display those things that you have developed."
CELISSE HENDERSON

"I have definitely found work and friendships through social media but the ones that have meant anything have been entirely accidental."
HARRISON WHITFORD

Given that many of our respondents have built communities that number in the hundreds of thousands across a swathe of disparate social media platforms, we're curious how they got there and what allowed them to grow loyal, dedicated followings for the content they create. Many of the panel's answers made use of the same words and phrases to explain their rise (see right). It won't surprise you to learn that things like consistency, honesty and personality are key.

"Posting consistently and posting content that people can learn from. YouTube is transactional, meaning people want to get something for free from your content. If you can make videos that help people learn new things – and post those videos consistently – you'll find success."
RHETT SHULL

"The main thing that's helped is my desire to be welcoming, inclusive and conversational. I want people to feel comfortable about approaching their instruments, so you probably won't see me post a video called 'Why You're Wrong' or something like that."
MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

"Being myself and sharing my reflections, failures, successes and dad jokes has helped me connect to my audience on a more human level. I'm not sure that's increased the numbers but it has increased the quality of interaction."
LEILA SIDI

"Consistent activity and engagement. I'm at my best when I'm acting as a resource of experience for others and sharing my perspective as a musician with other musicians."
SHELBY POLLARD

Social media is a two-way street and part of what makes it so compelling for fans is their ability to interact directly with artists and influencers via these free platforms. You need only look at the comments under any popular YouTuber or Instagrammer's latest post to see that fans are not shy about providing feedback to the content's creator. But do the creators actually pay attention to all that – and if they do, is it helpful?

"Constructive criticism and feedback are super-important to listen to and take on board. It helps you to improve your content."
SOPHIE BURRELL

"I don't allow my audience to dictate the things that I post but their opinions definitely do influence me."
RUBEN WAN

"Feedback (regardless of venue) is incredibly important when it comes to improving our products and making them more useful for our customers."
JOEL KORTE

"You can gain such valuable insight from social media since your audience is so diverse – you have a global audience at your fingertips."
NICHOLAS VEINOGLOU

"We've definitely reached out to our Patreon fans for their opinion, as well as done occasional polls over Instagram. In either case, we respond as much as we're able to in regards to feedback."
TAREK JAFAR

"I compose music for myself. If people like it, that's awesome. If I was creating just for the likes, I'd be doing something more mainstream than instrumental crossover music!"
MALENY MIKELS

"It is important to engage with feedback and the community on social media or else you're really missing the possible connections. However, you have to take the criticism with some perspective. It's like the old adage, 'Don't take criticism from someone you wouldn't take advice from.'"
SHELBY POLLARD

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PART 2

GEAR

No matter what you're doing in the world of guitar, you won't get far without the right gear. But what does that mean to the people who make their living in guitar in 2021? Even before the pandemic put gigs on hold for most of us, things were rapidly changing and evolving in this sphere – a fact quickly confirmed when we ask our panel about the most essential piece of gear they need to do their jobs. While most of them naturally picked out a guitar as their most important object first and foremost, for other members of our panel things were not so clear-cut.

"My computer. It's not a sexy answer but it's the truth. My entire channel and business wouldn't be possible without it."
RHETT SHULL

"Aside from a very versatile guitar, a very clean-sounding amp."
ISAIAH SHARKEY

"Aside from my guitar, I guess for YouTube, recording and content in general, it's my camera and Mac setup. An honourable mention goes to my phone – I do everything on it."
RABEA MASSAAD

"Uhh, all of it? Without a camera, audio recorder, guitar, amp, pedals, mics, etc, I can't do any of my work!"
RYAN BURKE

"A well-treated room to record my guitars in. As remote recording has become increasingly essential, I find myself doing more and more guitar stems from the home studio than ever before. If you really want to be a successful session musician nowadays, spend your money on getting your room to sound as good as it possibly can: a properly treated room will do more for your acoustic guitar recording than any $3,000 microphone you will ever buy."
JAY LEONARD J

"The most essential thing I need to do my job is the presence of mind to show up in any musical situation and bring the most I can into that project. There might be a killer guitar rental in the room or studio but if I'm not in the right headspace to collaborate from a sense of joy and curiosity, the gear doesn't really matter."
CELISSE HENDERSON

With the rapid rise of direct recording and pedalboard amplifiers, and the increasing need for live performers to be able to control their onstage volume levels to the point where even small valve combos can make things awkward for soundmen, it's heartening to learn that many members of our panel still use honest-to-goodness amps on a regular basis.

"I use one almost every day, pretty much any time I plug in an electric guitar. I haven't integrated a digital setup that I feel excited about yet. I use a variety of small and large amps depending on the room and how loud I want to be."
MATTHEW HOOPES

"I use an amp pretty much every day. I spend a lot of time with modellers because of the convenience and the ability to get a variety of tones. But at some point during the day, I'll end up plugging into one of my tube amps. I rarely use a cabinet though. I'm almost always playing through the [Two Notes Torpedo] Captor X or the [UA] Ox these days."
RHETT SHULL

"I use an amp every single day. Even when I tour, I bring along one of those silly 9V battery amps. I use them in my hotel room and in the green room, etc. When I'm home, I typically use my Princeton."
DR MOLLY MILLER

The worrying talk of the amplifier's demise might be a little premature, then. But that's certainly not the case for all our contributors, some of whom find the convenience and quality of modern digital solutions difficult to beat, especially in a pandemic.

"I mainly use plugins when I'm playing at my desk. I live in quite a small apartment and my neighbours wouldn't appreciate me cranking my EVH! I would love to use my main amp more at home."
SOPHIE BURRELL

"Since the pandemic started, I've been recording from home so much, and I mostly use a [Line 6] Helix Rack, so I really don't need to use an amp, unless the artist I record for wants me to."
MALENY MIKELS

"None at all for at least three years. I've sold off all my amps and go direct into my interface for any content I create and even when I'm in the studio."
BENJAMIN MAH

"I haven't used a guitar amp on a gig or on tour in about two years – Kemper made it too easy! I do, however, practise at home with an amp, and am hoping to start using amps on tour again. They actually sound so much better."
NICHOLAS VEINOGLOU

"I HAVEN'T USED A GUITAR AMP ON A GIG OR ON TOUR IN TWO YEARS – KEMPER MADE IT TOO EASY!"
NICHOLAS VEINOGLOU

PART 3

INCLUSION

While there's no doubt that the guitar world is a more diverse and welcoming place than it was a few decades ago, there's still clearly work to be done. The era of guitar culture being the exclusive preserve of the heterosexual white man might be over but that's still the majority demographic, even if things are slowly changing.

But how do we – both as individuals and as part of the wider industry – ensure that guitar continues to become a more supportive place for everyone? As the leaders of our industry, the finger is often pointed at big brands to set examples and be more inclusive in terms of the artists they champion and the products they make. But are they doing enough to promote diversity?

"I don't think 'enough' should be the goal. But brands have and are taking steps in the right direction for more diversity and inclusion. I'll occasionally come across pages that only feature a bunch of guitar dudes and I just feel like it doesn't reflect the entirety of the people working in the music industry. I will say, too, as an Asian woman, I hope to see more Asian representation from music brands."
TIANA OHARA

"The industry is definitely getting more diverse but we aren't there yet. I don't think it's the brands as much as it is the audiences. The brands are trying to include more diversity but the audiences often kick up a storm when it comes to accepting that, which is really disappointing to see. I struggle to understand how people can be so closed-minded this day and age."
FILIPE PAMPURI

"There's been a lot of growth with diversity and inclusion. I never used to see women represented in the guitar community and I'm seeing a lot more of that online. The lack of representation can discourage younger students from picking up the instrument. If they don't see anyone that looks like them, they won't think they can get involved. I believe that the newer trend of having all types of people representing guitar companies will encourage more people to play the guitar."
DR MOLLY MILLER

"I would like to see more active representation of BIPOC, trans artists and women who represent beyond traditional femininity."
VANESSA WHEELER

"I'd like to see more options for people with disabilities, including effects pedals that don't rely on floor-based switching, displays with selectable colour-blindness profiles, and a range of instruments for folks with limited mobility. The video games industry has a lot to teach us in that regard. Music is for everyone."
MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

"There can always be more awareness of the issues that surround diversity and inclusion. As long as it feels like the company genuinely supports these causes, it won't come off as if they're only doing it because it seems trendy to them. In all cases, promoting diversity and inclusion is important and should be a foundational tenet in all industries."
TAREK JAFAR

"If you have the skills and the drive, there is a place for you in music. With the strength of social media, artists don't need to rely on the industry to get their deserved recognition. Build an audience and make the industry follow you."
JAY LEONARD J

"A lot of brands are slowly but surely starting to pivot their overall messaging. But there's a difference between a few social media posts and creating an environment on every level that is, in fact, diverse. If a brand looks around at its staff, artists and customers, and they don't reflect what it is trying to promote, then there might be more to look at. The industry as a whole is moving in a more inclusive direction but until I show up to NAMM and it's not 95 per cent white, male, heterosexual and cisgendered, there's more change to be had."
CELISSE HENDERSON

"I don't think promotion is the key to diversity and inclusion. I'd love to ask the question: are brands hiring people with diverse backgrounds? And are people choosing to support brands that are already run by folks who are Black, Indigenous and people of colour?"
LEILA SIDI

"UNTIL I SHOW UP TO NAMM AND IT'S NOT 95 PER CENT WHITE, MALE, HETEROSEXUAL AND CISGENDERED, I THINK THERE IS MORE CHANGE TO BE HAD"

CELISSE HENDERSON

Several members of our panel highlighted the fact that even though the guitar is slowly becoming a more pluralistic instrument, the bulk of the media, products and artists in the industry are still squarely aimed at the 'traditional' audience.

"The generation that ushered in the gear era has a very narrow definition of 'guitar hero' – and that definition is perpetuated to this day. We need to open up our definitions of guitar hero to include anyone that inspires someone else to create music."
SHELBY POLLARD

"I think the 'traditional' audience (and the snobbery that often comes with that) is still a dominant force but social media has helped more unconventional musicians find their communities and connect with fans online."
BENJAMIN MAH

"Tradition is useful and great in so many ways but it also can mean the exclusion of folks who were never in those spaces to begin with."
VANESSA WHEELER

"Guitar culture in general needs quite the overhaul. It's very much geared towards straight white cis men. There's nothing wrong with that group of people but I would say that, as a Black woman, I rarely if *ever* see myself reflected back in any spaces where there is guitar. As conversations continue about diversity and inclusion, it has to also stretch to this space in regards to honouring different playing styles and different approaches to the instrument that come from all different kinds of people."
CELISSE HENDERSON

However, for some of our panel, the pluralistic nature of guitar is allowing the instrument to find new audiences, new voices and new ways of expression that can be both unique as well as inspired by the sounds and players that have come before.

"There's a healthy balance between tradition and new, innovative ways of approaching the instrument. In innovation, I still feel that it's very important to study what came before you, and tradition. Understanding the foundation of your instrument is vital, so I encourage all to do so."
ISAIAH SHARKEY

"In my eyes, there are tons of niches these days. There's engagement for all of those. You can dip in and out of all of them."
RABEA MASSAAD

"Playing guitar in unconventional ways is favoured as long as you're doing it with pristine quality. Some younger audiences see traditional guitar as lacklustre and boring, so they prefer unique approaches to the instrument. The keyword here is the 'virtuosity'. Ultimately, playing in less conventional ways is only good if it sounds good to the ears."
RUBEN WAN

"I like to think there are multiple guitar cultures. The dominant one tends to have a less diverse audience but people left out of those spaces are creating world-changing spaces for themselves."
LEILA SIDI

PART 4

SUSTAINABILITY

The thorny issues of ethical consumption and sustainability are rapidly changing the wider world, as well as the way we live our lives. What we eat, what we buy, where we travel and how we get there are issues we all wrestle with – but what about the guitars we invest in? Many brands are now beginning to navigate the myriad obstacles of sustainability but is it something that our panel feel strongly about? Their answers probably reflect the varied and conflicting opinions of those reading this.

Most of our members agree that they'd like the guitar industry to be more sustainable and to reduce its environmental impact but many of them weren't sure how this could be achieved practically. But there were some suggestions.

"I think I'm in the category of people who do little more than think about it – and that's not a good thing. The reality is that I'm blind to the impact that my purchases and what I talk about and promote online have on people and ecosystems around the world, and this question is making me realise I should change that."
RHETT SHULL

"I've never given it a thought and I don't know too many people that have strong opinions about it."
RUBEN WAN

"It's definitely important but it's not imperative. Under capitalism, I don't think it's possible to be an ethical consumer in the holistic sense. But this poses a good reason to buy vintage instruments and to look for companies that produce things ethically. I've been playing a guitar built by Mike Baranik that's almost entirely recycled and I think that's an amazing concept."
HARRISON WHITFORD

"It's important to me but honestly, I feel like I need to do more research on guitar gear sustainability."
TIANA OHARA

"It's extremely important to me as a musician who travels frequently. The sustainability of an instrument is also important because it helps with maintenance, as well as consistency while performing."
ISAIAH SHARKEY

"I TRY TO SOURCE MATERIALS AS LOCALLY AS POSSIBLE AND WITH THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF TRANSPARENCY I CAN FIND. BUT THERE ARE LIMITS TO WHAT'S POSSIBLE ON A SMALL SCALE"
LEILA SIDI

"Especially in this day and age, anything we can do to help in this context is important."
JOEL KORTE

"This is, in some ways, at the core of Black Bobbin's business model, as we are ordering only what is requested of our customer base, instead of trying hard to push more gear out the door to make money. Also, we partner with really great boutique brands that I can assure you are treating their staff with respect, paying them a liveable wage, and in general whose ideals align with mine."
SHELBY POLLARD

"Education and accountability are really important. For instance, when I want to order bone nut blanks for repairs, I do my best to ensure that I'm acquiring these products from cruelty-free sources. But for most suppliers, the information just isn't out there. Inlay materials, finishes, all of these things we take for granted play a role here."
MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

"Reduce the amount of waste in the manufacturing process and create longer-lasting high-quality products that don't break in a short amount of time."
YVETTE YOUNG

"One of my main goals is to go plastic-free with my packaging. A lot of the environmental cost is in the way that things are packaged and the materials required."
MATTHEW HOOPES

"Try and source all of the components of building and making stuff from sustainable places. In an ideal world, all the parts, all the materials and all the components used – like glue, paint, etc – would be sourced in a sustainable way."
RABEA MASSAAD

"I'm curious about a shift in gear culture towards the careful choosing of gear vs the constant consumption of it. I try to source materials as locally as possible and with the highest level of transparency I can find. There are limits to what is possible on a small scale, but I try."
LEILA SIDI

INSTRUMENTS OF ICONS

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PHOTO: TRAVIS SHINN

PART 5

WHY WE DO IT

It's safe to say that any investigation into what makes modern guitar players tick is likely to get heavy, and ours has shown that, while the guitar industry has become a more diverse and welcoming place for players of all stripes in recent years, there's still plenty of work to be done. However, each member of our panel still wakes up every day and chooses to make, to play, to present and to perform with the guitar at the heart of everything they do.

"I don't think guitar is dying. I think more people are inspired to pick it up thanks to how guitar music is progressing, and more diverse representation. It's becoming more diverse and people are becoming more open-minded to its different applications. We're becoming more focused on textures and musicality rather than virtuosity."
YVETTE YOUNG

"Social media and the internet have made it easy to connect with people all over the world. I love being able to develop relationships with people regardless of where they live. It makes the community feel bigger and the world feel warmer."
DR MOLLY MILLER

"There are so many resources available now – there are fantastic tools for learning, great communities to collaborate with, and endless gear to drool over. It's a wonderful time to be a starting guitarist. I can't wait to hear where the next generation takes guitar."
JAY LEONARD J

"I do it for the enthusiasm and the excitement. With the pandemic, a lot of folks found themselves with a lot of free time to finally learn to play, to create, to enjoy their instruments. I love that. It's what keeps me going as a musician and an educator – helping people find new ways to have fun with the thing."
MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

"Guitar is still defined only by the player. If you give the same instrument to 10 musicians and ask them to play the same song, the nuances of their voice will undoubtedly shine through. That is the beauty of this instrument: it allows your internal emotions to be heard and expressed in a way that someone else can hear and understand."
SHELBY POLLARD

"It's still just an incredibly evocative and interesting instrument, in terms of composition and performance. There's nothing else quite like it."
JOEL KORTE

"I do it for the versatility of the instrument. I'm grateful to still be working, and that the guitar means as much to me now as it did when I first picked it up at four years old. I'm still exploring the instrument and music, and there's always some new excitement that keeps me inspired."
ISAIAH SHARKEY

"It's the diversity. I love the sheer amount of different vibes of guitar playing that I see all the time. It's just awesome to tune in to all those different niches and see all the cool stuff going on in there."
RABEA MASSAAD

"That guitar is making a comeback in a big way. We're about to catch a wave that will last for generations and that makes me really excited."
RHETT SHULL

"It's beginning to feel like guitar is for everyone and that it's opening the door to lots of different instruments and types of music-making."
VANESSA WHEELER

"Guitar is constant. Amid all the uncertainty and chaos of the past year, guitar is one of the things that has brought me peace and joy. Regardless of what exact guitar I'm playing, it always feels like I'm reuniting with my other half. It's always familiar yet exciting."
TIANA OHARA

Marshall

THE MONEY SHOT
1952 GIBSON LES PAUL GOLDTOP

We enjoy a close encounter with one of the first 100 Les Pauls ever made and find that it's well worth its weight in gold

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Even by the lofty standards of 1950s Les Pauls, this is a rare bird indeed. Recently acquired by our friends at ATB Guitars, this all-original 1952 Goldtop was one of the first 100 Les Pauls ever made – and we were lucky enough to spend a few days with it.

How can you tell it was one of the very first Les Pauls to leave 225 Parsons Street back in the day? Since they didn't have serial numbers, the first 1952 Goldtops can be identified by several key features unique to the earliest examples. These features were changed later that year, and included diagonal adjustment screws on the bridge P-90 and an unbound fingerboard.

The eagle-eyed will also notice that the dot over the letter 'i' is connected to the 'G' on the headstock logo. Remove the bridge pickup, meanwhile, and you'll find that the wiring channel passes diagonally through the centre of the bridge pickup rout, rather than the treble side.

In addition, the control cavity is shaped more like a parallelogram than the clover-like outline Gibson later settled on, and the body is about one eighth of an inch deeper than the bodies of later Les Paul Goldtops.

Though the trapeze 'wrap-under' bridge and shallow neck angle of early Les Pauls are often maligned, every aspect of this particular guitar seems to work together harmoniously, with a superb balance between the pickups and some truly spectacular amplified tones. It's also a very resonant example and, with a weight of just 3.6kg/7.9lb, it's one of the lightest Goldtops we've ever encountered.

The neck's soft V profile is a joy to play. While the bridge design rules out palm muting, there isn't much else that this guitar won't do. Indeed, if the stock bridge really bothers you, aftermarket solutions are available, such as the non-invasive retrofit bridge designs from MojoAxe (mojoaxe.com) and Glaser Instruments (musiccitybridge.com). These units wrap over rather than under and also provide intonation compensation.

Check out the accompanying video on our YouTube channel to hear this incredible musical instrument in action, and stay tuned to *Guitar.com* for more vintage content.

Visit atbguitars.com for more information

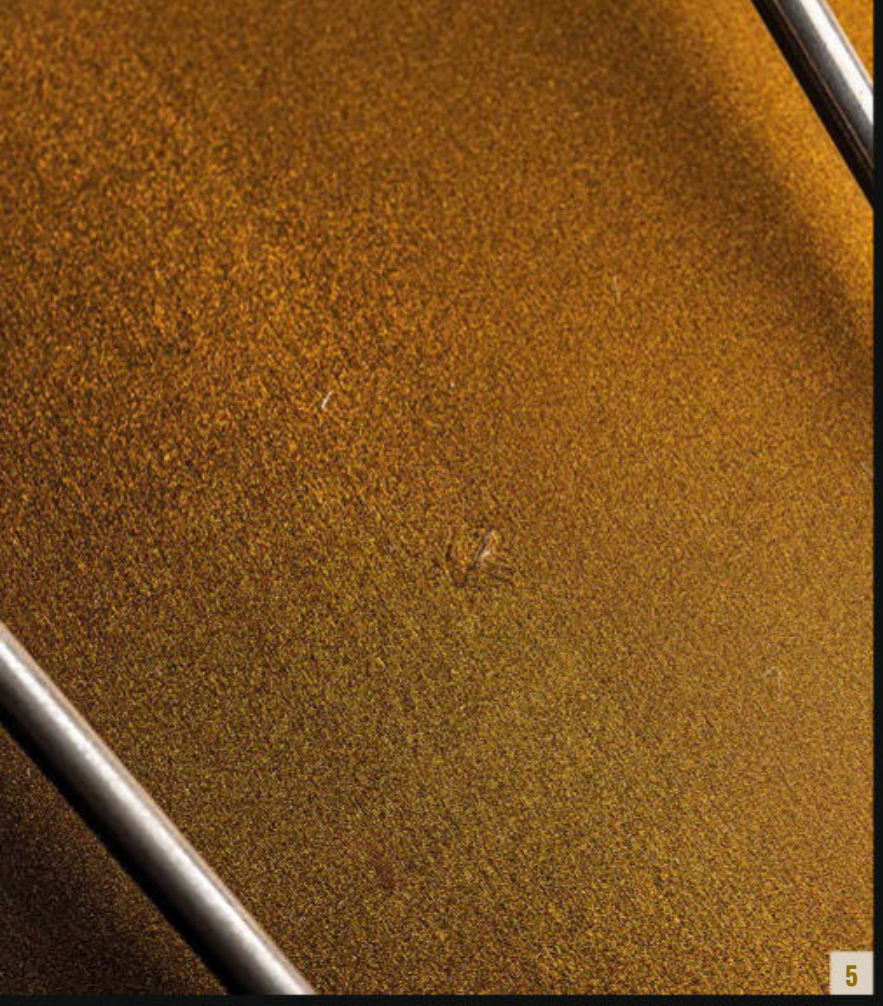
ABOVE Unlike on later examples, the dot over the letter 'i' is connected to the 'G' on the headstock logo

1 The body is approximately one eighth of an inch deeper than the bodies of later Goldtops and Standards

2 Later Goldtops feature fingerboard binding and tortoiseshell position-markers – the side dots here are white

3 There's some fret and fingerboard wear here but nothing that impacts negatively on the guitar's tone or playability

4 Wear on the body is minimal and doesn't detract from the guitar's value or appearance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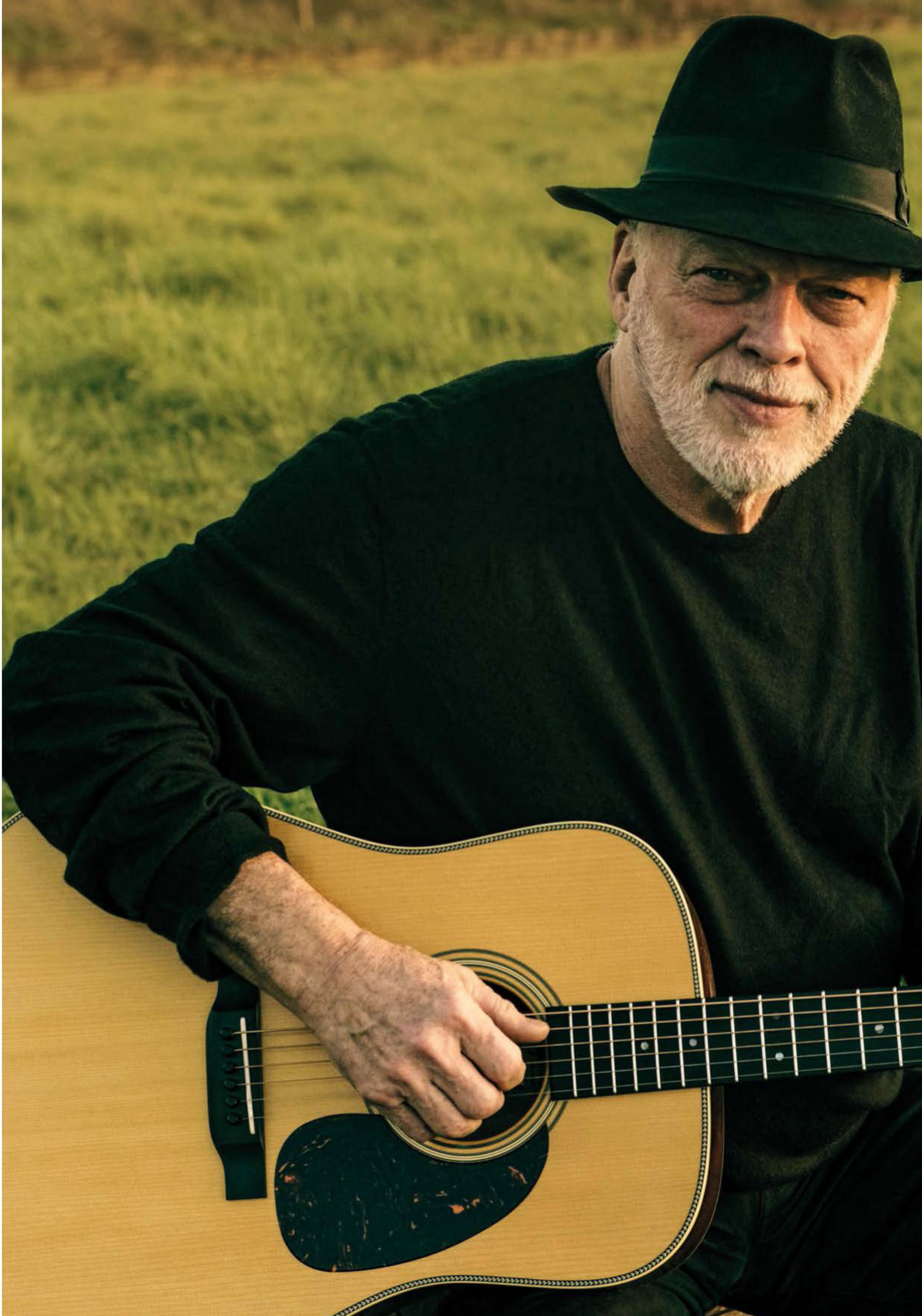
5 The maple top is centre-joined and you can even see evidence of some flame under the gold paint

6 Unlike those of later Les Pauls, this early model's control cavity is more parallelogram-like in shape

7 The 'no-line' Kluson tuners here are the original set

8 The earliest Les Pauls featured bridge P-90s with diagonal adjustment screws

9 The taller speed knobs are also typical of the era



ANY COLOUR YOU LIKE

HOW MARTIN'S FRED GREENE MADE DAVID GILMOUR'S DREAM GUITARS A REALITY

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS
PORTRAITS POLLY SAMSON
OTHER IMAGERY MARTIN GUITAR

David Gilmour's signature D-35 models are manufactured at Martin's headquarters in Nazareth, Pennsylvania

CF Martin & Company's history of symbiotic artist relations has led to multiple iconic signature guitars, including collaborations with such legends as Eric Clapton, Stephen Stills and John Mayer. Ahead of January's virtual NAMM show, the Nazareth brand announced the addition of David Gilmour to the fold with the release of six- and 12-string David Gilmour Custom Signature D-35 models. Here, we catch up with Martin's vice president of product Fred Greene to find out more.

Bringing a new signature model into being is a demanding process, especially during a pandemic. How is Martin meeting the challenges of the current climate?

"Well, it's definitely a brave new world. That said, we recognise that this is the reality we're in today and this is what we have to do and how we have to do it. There are a handful of iconic Martin artists who we have not had the opportunity to work with directly to create a signature model – David Gilmour was at the top of that list. We had no expectations but Westside, our UK distributor, had been working it for a while, trying to find a way to make it happen.

"I think that after David sold many of his guitars at auction and we saw his D-35 go for over a million dollars, that sort of got things going. We thought that maybe he'd be up for doing this, especially if there was a charity component to it. It's not like he needs more guitars! Honestly, it was actually a bit of a shock when he agreed."

You've been involved with several signature models over the years. How did the creation of David Gilmour's guitars differ from previous experiences?

"Signature models can be tricky. You can tell when a company has approached an artist with a finished guitar and just said, 'Are you okay with this?', and it hits the market as a full signature model. That is not what happens at Martin. I work closely with our artists and each signature model is a genuine partnership between us and people like Eric Clapton, John Mayer and now David Gilmour. It's their name going on it and they reserve the right to say no at any point.

"Our main goal is to try and engage the artist in a way that allows them to play a meaningful role in the creation of their instrument. And it was clear from the outset that David was determined to be very active in the process, just like a Pink Floyd recording,

where he's going to be very involved and specific about what he wants – not just handing it over to a producer. We agreed to that challenge very happily because it's how we've always worked with artists.

"Right from the beginning, we knew we wanted to do a six- and a 12-string. Our first thought was that David would want an exact replica of his guitars. His Martin D-35 is from 1969 and he bought it outside Manny's Music in New York in 1971. The story goes that he was just going into the store and there was a guy outside trying to sell this guitar. David played it, loved it and bought it.

"To be honest, though, while a recreation would have been cool, it didn't excite me as much as the prospect of developing new models, and I was very happy when David said that he wanted to go in that direction. I think that probably says a lot about him as an artist, too. He's never sitting still. He's always creating. I don't think it's in his nature to rehash things he's already done, and that's how I looked at these instruments.

"Obviously, you can't rush this kind of thing. We were working via intermediaries, where David would send a list of what did and didn't work for him, which was then getting communicated back to us. So we were creating parts and indeed finished instruments based on the feedback we were getting. When David liked something, he would sign off on it officially but, up until that point, we were working from his notes on what we'd sent him.

"We always aim to be super-respectful of artists of this stature – to give them what they want, to be as timely as we can, essentially to try and help them understand that these projects demand time to get right and that we are totally okay with that. It's not like you send it back to us and then two days later we send you the next version. It doesn't work like that. We have to make new tools, set up new measurements. It can take weeks to get something processed, so the design stage alone was a year in the making. Obviously, a global pandemic did not make things any easier!"

The D-35 is a classic spruce and rosewood dreadnought design with a distinctive three-piece back. David Gilmour's signature models take a slightly different route and boast some forward-thinking features. What was the inspiration behind these choices, particularly the decision to move away from rosewood in favour of something new?

"We have played around with the three-piece back motif of the 35 model quite a bit over the years, taking it away from the original rosewood. We've released guitars through the Custom Shop with centre wedges of different woods like Hawaiian koa, always looking to find a new little bit of magic somewhere. But in most cases, it's been aesthetic rather than tonal. This is the first time we have used something other than rosewood for the whole back and sides.

The guitar comes in six- and 12-string versions, with branding kept to a minimum

"David was very open to the use of the sinker mahogany [wood that's from logs salvaged from riverbeds, having sunk decades if not centuries before – it's particularly prized because it comes from old-growth forests and, often, the mineral content from the riverbed gives it a unique look and sound]. No new trees were cut down to make these guitars. They were created exclusively from old, salvaged materials.

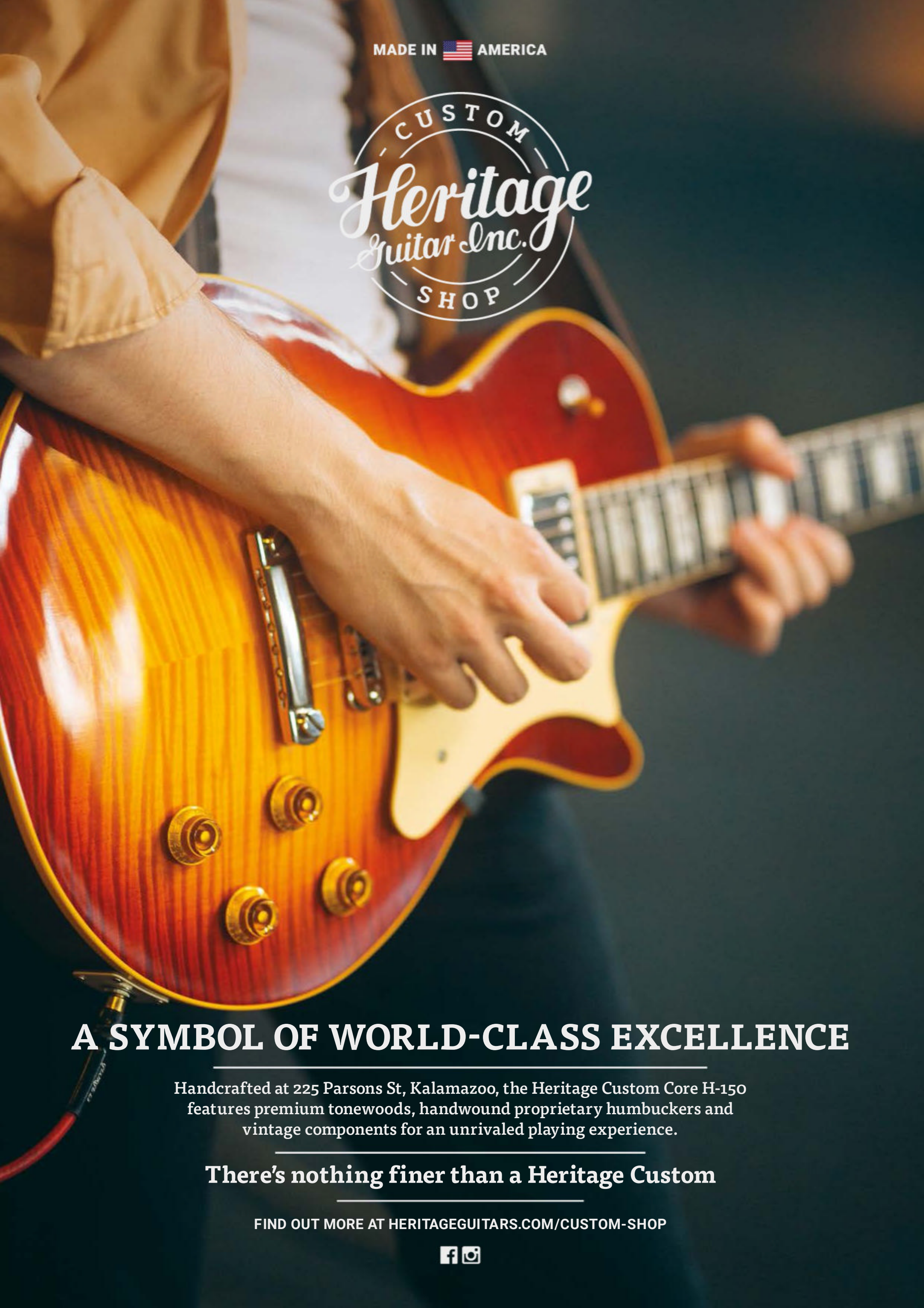
"We also included a carbon-fibre bridge plate – the same design that's in our Modern Deluxe range. That's a very interesting component made from two pieces of carbon fibre with a slice of maple in the middle, which boosts some of the high-end frequencies and makes the guitar a little bit louder. David was really interested in that approach.

"For the six-string, David chose Adirondack spruce with Adirondack bracing but for the 12-string, he went for Carpathian spruce with Sitka braces. That makes total sense when you think about it: European spruce can accentuate the overtone content of a guitar – and that's what you want in a 12-string.

"So much of the process was just responding to David's feedback with the benefit of expertise and experience, really listening to what he wanted and acting on it, because we knew it would be worth it. There are no shortcuts in this game."

What was the most demanding part of the process?

"The piece that we went back and forth on the most was the neck. It's a completely new neck profile, unlike any other we offer. To start with, we sent out a bunch of necks so David could tell us what suited him. That was important because it established a shared frame of reference, and it not only made communication easier but also gave David an idea of just how varied the options were. It can be really hard for someone to tell you what they want without an actual example. You need to have held that neck to understand.



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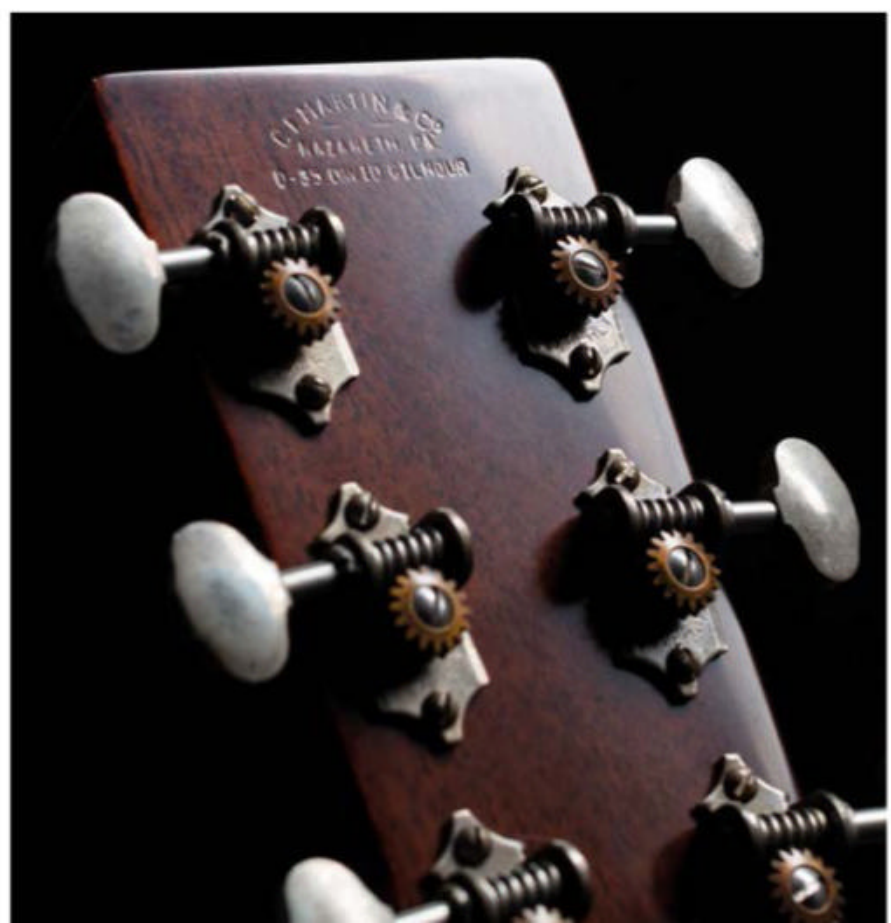


Instead of the classic rosewood, Gilmour's D-35 models feature sinker mahogany backs and sides

"The Gilmour six-string has the classic 1-11/16 inch nut width and it's a little more squared off than our standard D shape. It has the same depth as a full-thickness neck, with some shoulder to it, which gives it a much more vintage feel. It's like a V that's been softened by decades of playing. It's a beautiful neck. We're very proud of it."

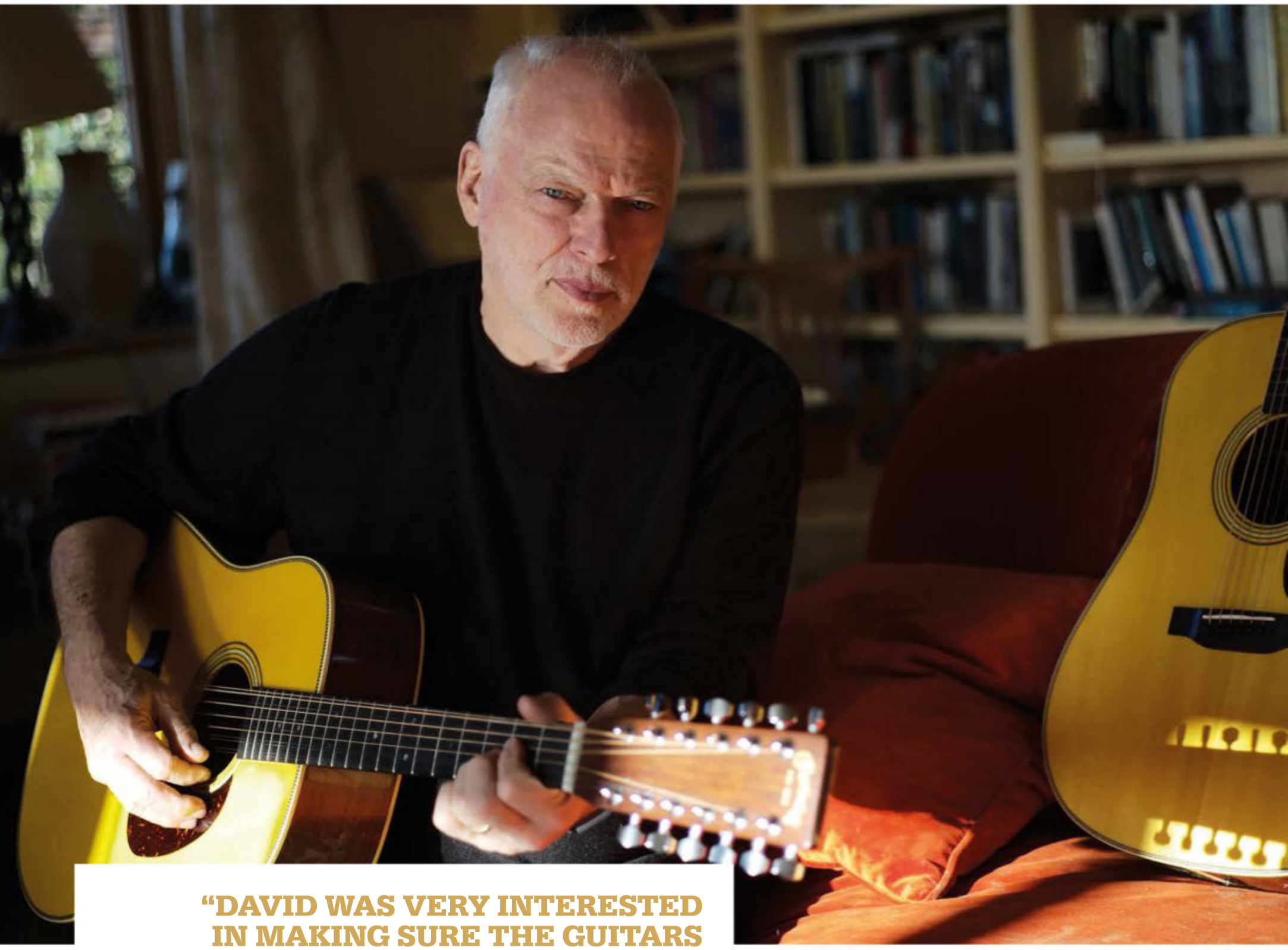
How do these guitars differ sonically from a classic D-35?

"Sometimes the low end on 35 models can be a little overpowering, especially if you're trying to record. The guitar has some intrinsic characteristics that push towards the bass. I was just upstairs playing the Gilmour signature guitar – it happened to be in the room while I was doing a livestream and I was playing it to calm my nerves. The attack is a little sharper and more detailed. We have learned that a mahogany 35 cuts through better, with more immediacy to the note too.

"These new Gilmour models are also much lighter and they're very lively and responsive. There is more to that than just the haptic response of the guitar against the body though. The sound really is unique. Mahogany just works so well on bigger instruments. We have an original 1920s 12-fret dreadnought in the Martin museum, which will change your belief about everything when you touch it!"

The aesthetic details on signature guitars are a large part of their identity but in this case they're very subtle.

"Understated elegance is definitely our calling card. Well, we have two gears: understated and completely over the top and full of pearl – there's not much in between. David resisted the temptation to go crazy. All the details are subtle and beautiful, like the volute and the stamp on the back of the peghead, like the old New York-style guitars. Very classic stuff, little details that people who love Martin guitars will appreciate.



"DAVID WAS VERY INTERESTED IN MAKING SURE THE GUITARS DIDN'T LOOK TOO NEW. WE PLAYED WITH THE TONER TO GET THE COLOUR RIGHT"

"There's herringbone on here too, which makes it technically a HD-35. But the nomenclature piece can become a struggle, as we've done pretty much every version of everything over the years here at Martin. We've been at it since 1833 so you'll just have to forgive us on that one. I mean, really, it can't be a 35 without binding on the fingerboard but hey… and I know it's not an 18 either… I don't know what to tell you!

"David was very interested in making sure the guitars did not look too new. We played with the toner quite a bit to get the colour just right. There was a temptation to go down the relic route but we decided not to take it that far. Instead, we used our vintage-style finish, which is not super-glossy. It has a soft, brushed-on look, as if the gloss has gassed off over the years.

"Back in the 1920s and 1930s, before Martin began using buffing wheels to polish guitars, the instruments went through a completely different process, which we reintroduced for our Authentic line.

"David really liked that look, so we went for it, and right now this is the only guitar outside of our Authentic line that gets this finish package. It looks really cool in person. When you see it, you just want to touch it."

Did the sound of any Pink Floyd songs in particular influence these guitars?

"Ha! I know everybody will be expecting me to say *Wish You Were Here* and there is no question that the thought of that one song was like a guiding light showing us the way. For me, though, *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* is the ultimate Floyd Song.

"It's funny, David told me that his original Martin D-35 probably appeared on more Pink Floyd records than any other instrument that he owned. It was a constant sound throughout his career. I remember hearing him interviewed on the BBC for *Desert Island Discs*, and he said that if he could take any one thing to an island with him, it would be his Martin D-35. He also said that he saw a guitar not as a luxury but as a necessity. When I heard that, it gave me a huge sense of responsibility when it came to these models." G

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Invention Has A Sound

JHS Pedals supremo Josh Scott continues his exploration of the evolution of guitar effects with the introduction of another icon of American history. Brace yourself, we're going down river

WORDS JOSH SCOTT

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In our first dive into the long and fascinating relationship between electricity and the guitar, we caught up with Benjamin Franklin to explore the impact that George Beauchamp had on the history of our instrument. This time out, I'd like to introduce you to another fellow whose name you might not be familiar with: Samuel Clemens.

Clemens was a mid-19th century Missouri native who changed careers more often than Arnold Schwarzenegger (look, how many people can put *Young Hercules* and Governor of California on the same resumé?). Clemens started as a Mississippi riverboat pilot, then served as a Second Lieutenant in a Confederate militia for two weeks before deserting to go west with his brother Orion.

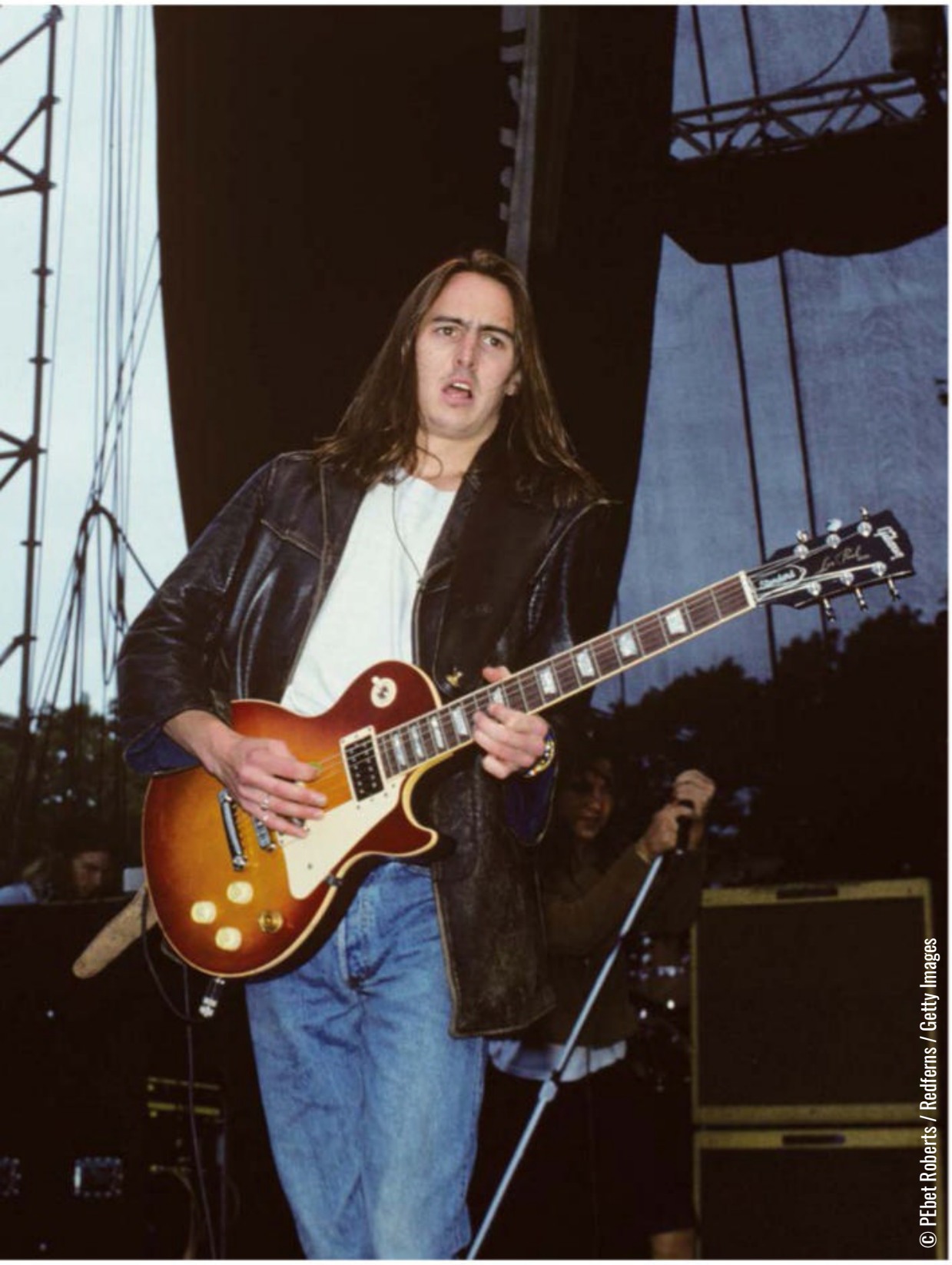
In Virginia City, Nevada, Clemens tried and failed to make it as a silver miner and eventually went to work for local newspaper the *Territorial Enterprise*. At long last, he'd found a career that would stick: writing. Clemens ended up writing at least 17 books, some of which you'd probably heard of: *The Adventures Of Tom Sawyer*, *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court*, *The Prince And The Pauper* and *Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn*. Sound familiar yet?

That's right. Samuel Clemens became Mark Twain, the father of American literature. Now, I can hear you already: "But, Josh, this is *Guitar Magazine*, not *Literary Review* – why are you talking about Mark Twain?" Well, I bring up Mr Twain because, believe it or not, he had something in common with us: he bought a guitar.

I like to imagine that, just like me, he heard a song, connected with it, and felt an overwhelming urge to create that kind of music himself

One day in 1861, as Twain made plans to avoid the Civil War and head out west with his brother, he purchased a used 1835 Martin parlor acoustic for $10. He travelled the rest of his life with this guitar by his side; it was a constant companion

I'm not sure what piqued Twain's interest. Maybe he heard a particularly metal cover of *Dixie* or *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, two of the most popular songs of the day. Maybe he wanted to impress his girlfriend. Maybe he needed something to help him pass the time during his *two-week* wagon ride to California. Personally, I like to imagine that, just like me, he heard a song, connected with it, and felt an overwhelming urge to create that kind of music himself.



Mike McCready and his Les Paul in 1992, striking a chord with millions of teenagers

LIVE ALIVE

When I was 14 years old, I heard Pearl Jam's *Alive* on my brother's cassette player and realised that somehow, a guitarist in his late twenties had an open window into my ninth-grade soul. With the sound of that main riff and solo, Mike McCready might as well have been reaching out through the speakers and rewiring my brain. Until then, I had never been that interested in music. But this moment changed me. I had to have a guitar. I had to create the sounds that I heard in that song.

After pestering my mother about it for weeks, she finally brought home a beautiful Korean-made Synsonics Stratocaster copy, and suddenly I was part of a bigger story. I was Luke Skywalker, a young Jedi bursting with almost unlimited potential, part of an ancient, honourable order who held the world's fate in their hands – and if that sounds dramatic, you're obviously not a real guitarist and I forgive you.

But unlike me, 26-year-old Mark Twain had never heard a Pearl Jam song or experienced the perfection of *Wonderwall*. But the instrument still drew him in. The simple sound of his Martin acoustic guitar was enough – and this itself was part of a macroevolution that dated back more than 2,000 years.

The ancestry of the first strings attached to a piece of wood could be heard in McCready and Stone Gossard's guitars. Like Twain's, theirs was an evolution of that same sound. And that $10 Martin of Twain's? It was valued at $15 million in 2015. That's enough to buy more than one million Synsonics Strat copies – and there's no way my mom could've fit those in her station wagon.

FANTASTIC JOURNEY

How did we make the journey from Mark Twain's acoustic guitar to Mike McCready's Les Paul? It's quite simple: 134 years of invention. Martin went on to create the dreadnought acoustic, Gibson made awe-inspiring archtop guitars and, as we learnt last time, Rickenbacker merged the primitive guitar of the time with that new and exciting force known as electricity. The electric guitar's new voice demanded a new audience and set the guitar on course for world domination.

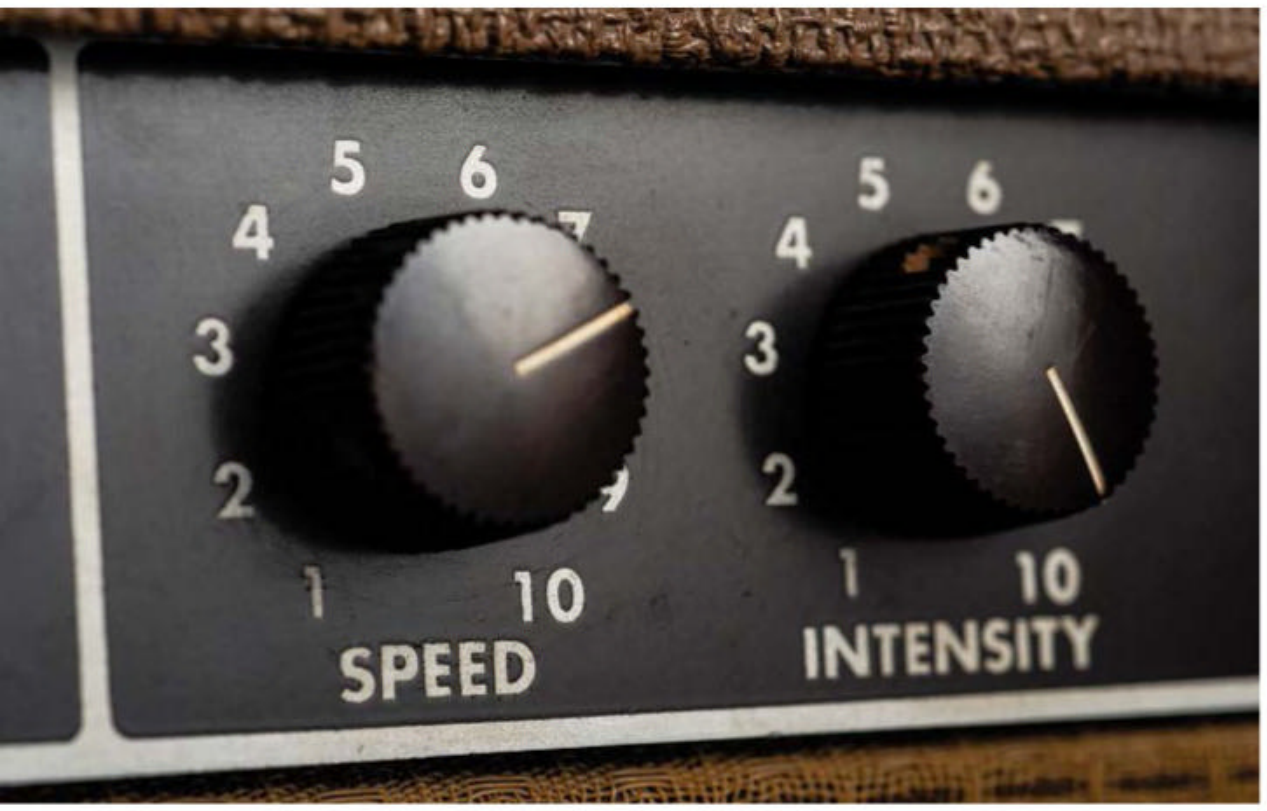
Last month we spoke about the earliest experiments in electric guitar. But there are three more innovations in the world of pre-1960s electric guitar that are of pivotal importance to effects lovers. We'll zoom in on the other two next time but, for today, we're going to explore the fascinating birth of everyone's favourite shuddering, juddering textural wonder: tremolo.

The origins of tremolo are equal parts clear and blurry. The term has different meanings depending on context but, from a guitar player's perspective, tremolo is volume modulation. In even simpler terms, it's the sound of turning the volume on and off. It's the same principle as taking the volume knob on your car stereo, playing a song and turning it down, up, down, up (you get the idea).

A similar sound appeared in classical music compositions as early as the 1600s. Later on, horn players began to cover the bell of their instruments to temporarily and rhythmically mute notes, creating a rapid rise and fall in volume. In the 1930s, organs included a tremolo circuit inside their tube amplifiers that gave their sound a moving, fluttering tone. Even accordionists inspired tremolo guitar with the way they manipulated the accordion's bellows to produce unique pulsating effects.

THE RIGHT MOVES

Indeed, so popular was this effect that tremolo has the distinction of being the first-ever standalone guitar effect. Released in 1946 by the DeArmond Research company of Toledo, Ohio, it was called the Tremolo Control, model 601, and was designed by Harry DeArmond. The same Harry DeArmond who helped his brother John market the first-ever commercially available guitar pickup on the market, which they had created from parts found on a Model-T Ford.



Fender's brown Deluxe was introduced in 1961 and its tremolo circuit remains a high-water mark for tonehounds

About the same size as a shoebox, the Tremolo Control is perfectly simple and would feel familiar to modern guitarists: two control knobs, Speed and Increase; a handle; an input jack for your instrument; a power cord; and a pre-attached output cable that plugs into your amplifier. Inside the enclosure, it's a bit more unconventional. There's a canister in there that looks like a can of beans. It's full of liquid and also contains a small electrode. In use, a motor moves the can, which sloshes the liquid around, shorting out the signal whenever the fluid touches it, and thus creating the tremolo effect. It might not pass modern health and safety standards but it worked. Tremolo and guitar – friends forever.

The first known recording of a tremolo effect is a great deal more subtle, however. Listen carefully to 1942's *Sugar Babe Blues* by cigar-chomping blues singer Roosevelt Sykes and you can just make it out in the background. By 1955 we were done with subtle. Bo Diddley put the effect front and centre of his eponymous smash hit *Bo Diddley*. This is what made tremolo famous, kick-starting its journey to reshape popular music. Without it, everything from *Gimme Shelter* by The Rolling Stones to *Bones* by Radiohead might be difficult to imagine. For the first time, the guitar had artificial movement and a personality beyond its natural voice: it was the beginning of a new age of effected guitars.

Once I get my time machine up and running – which should be any day now – I'm going to visit Mark Twain at some roadside saloon so that we can start a Western Americana grunge band. I'm confident that he'd be proud to know that he played a part not only in the renaissance of US literature but in a story that connects millions of people from all across the world: the tale of the ever-evolving guitar.

For more from Josh Scott, check out thejhsshow.com

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REVIEWS

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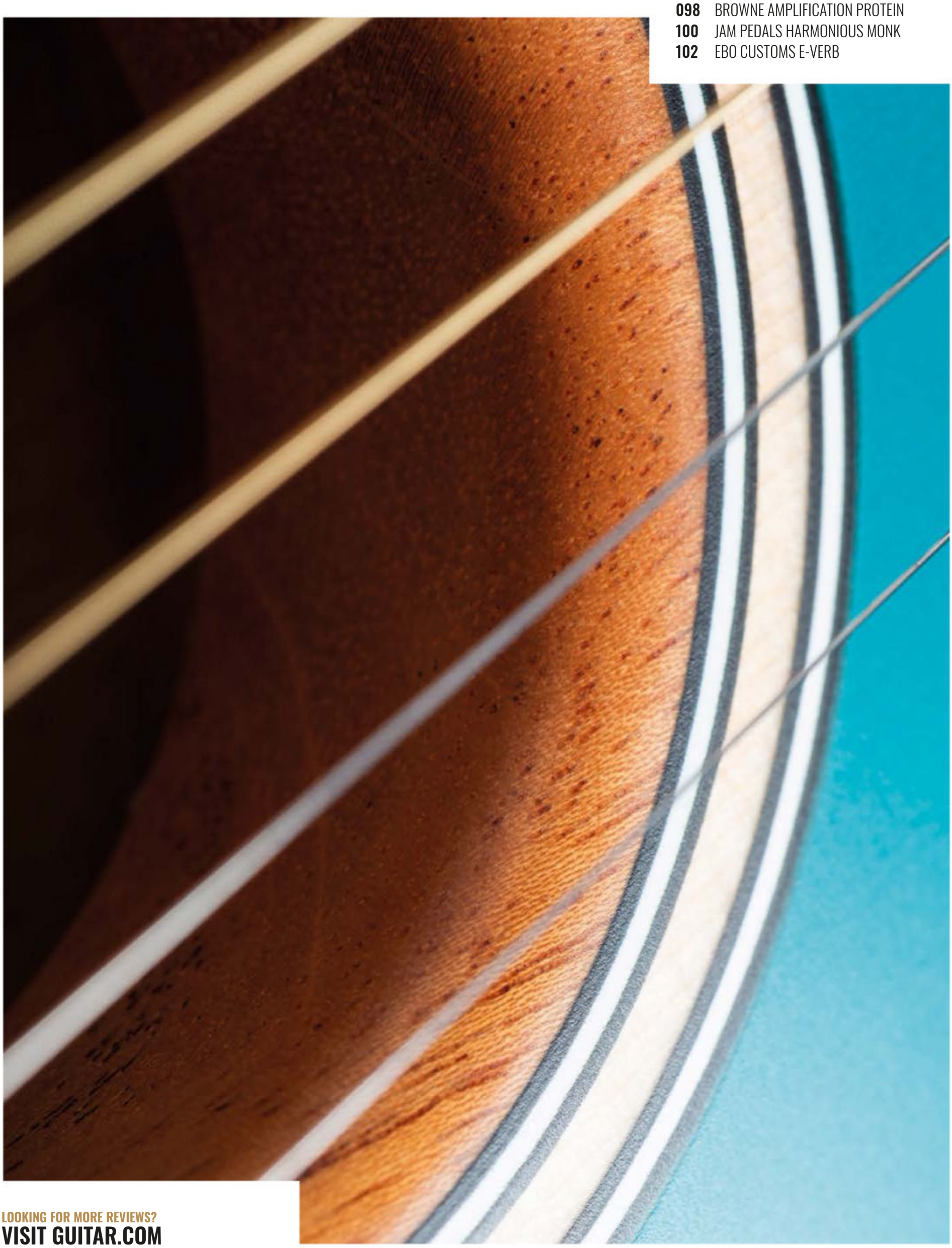

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Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

FENDER

AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC JAZZMASTER

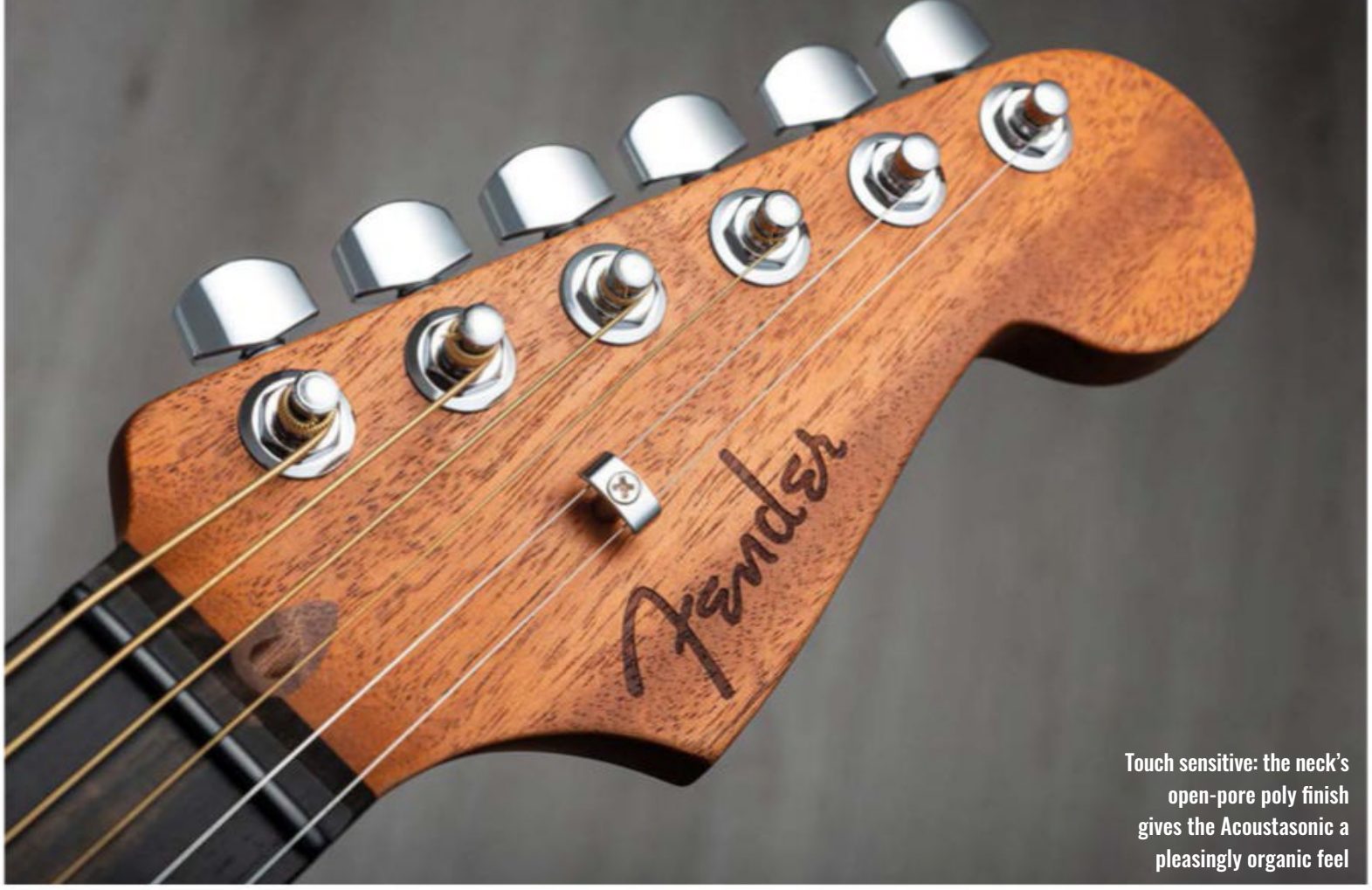
WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Fender's most famous offset-waist guitar gets the acoustic/electric hybrid treatment – and it's packing some unique new tones

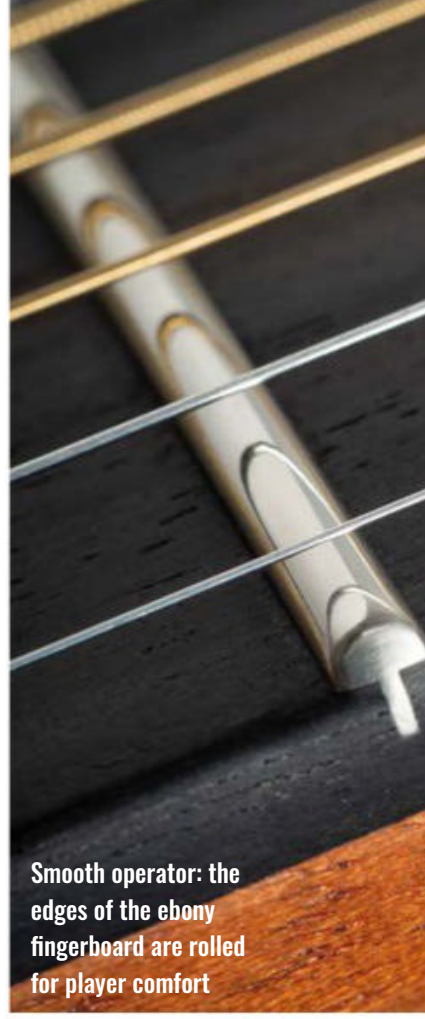
People have been trying to bridge the chasm between acoustic and electric guitar for decades, generally with results that might politely be described as 'limited'. But the commercial success of Fender's latest Acoustasonic models suggests that the tech required to execute this feat of hybrid design has finally caught up with the idea.

First, in early 2019, there was the American Acoustasonic Telecaster; a year later came a Strat version with tweaked voicing options; and now it's the turn of the Jazzmaster, refining the formula with that delectable swooping body shape and, perhaps more significantly, a humbucker.

Bridge building: the guitar sports Fender's Modern Asymmetrical bridge design



Touch sensitive: the neck's open-pore poly finish gives the Acoustasonic a pleasingly organic feel



Smooth operator: the edges of the ebony fingerboard are rolled for player comfort

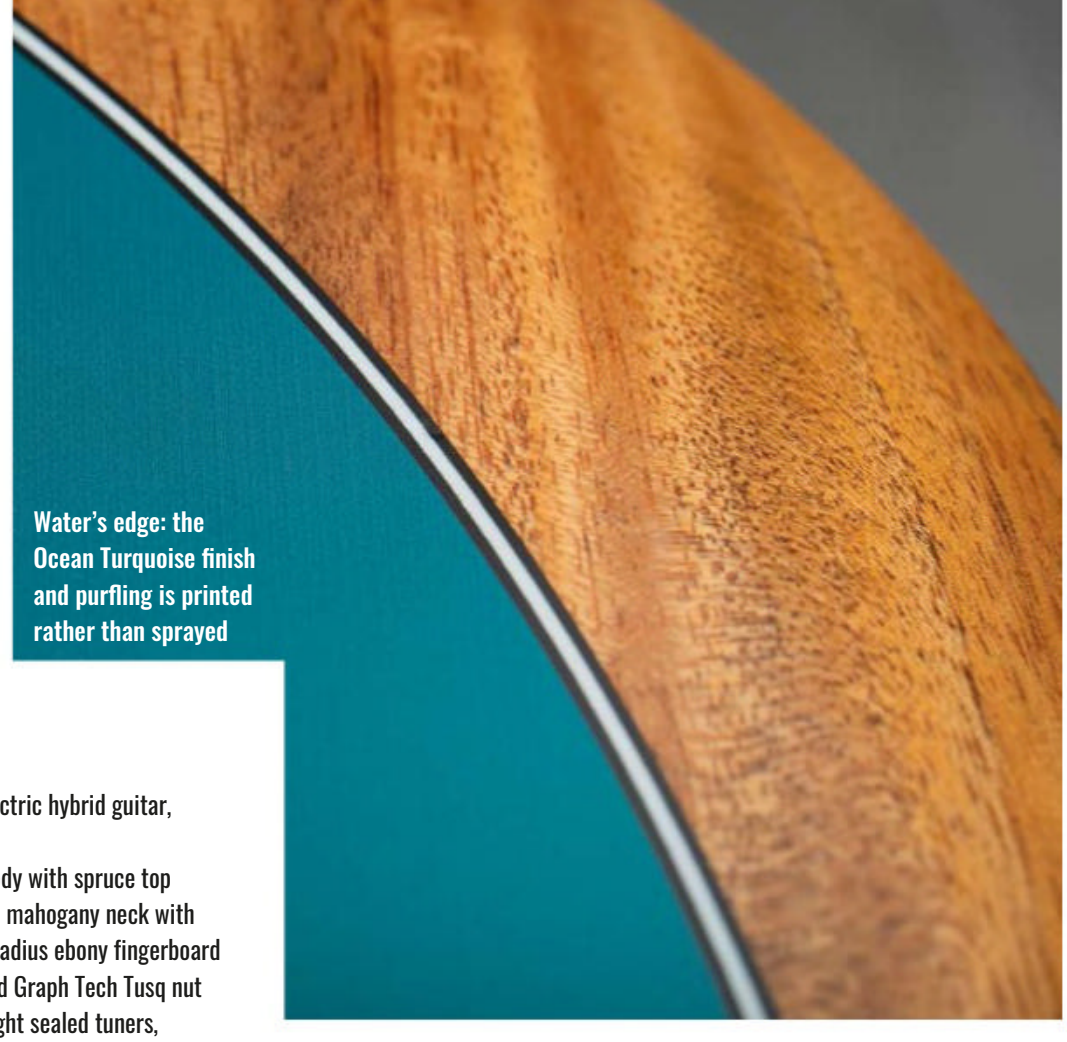
What is that formula? Well, the starting point is a thinline hollow body with a distinctly electric feel and a patented 'waterfall' soundport that makes it sound more like a full-size acoustic in the room. The really important stuff, however, is happening in the realm of electronics.

As before, there are three signal sources involved here: the single visible pickup, plus a piezo in the bridge and an internal body sensor. Clever digital processing converts all of this into 10 distinct sounds, and it's here that the Jazzmaster flexes its 'alternative' heritage. An array of six acoustic voices and two electric options tallies more or less with the Tele and Strat models but the final pair here are two new settings listed as 'Lo-fi piezo' and 'Lo-fi piezo crunch'. Intriguing.

The 10 sounds are arranged in pairs, each accessed via a Strat-style five-way blade selector. You might assume that the knob at the back is a tone control but it's actually for mixing between the two voices in each pairing.

If the priority was to ensure that this American Acoustasonic feels like a Jazzmaster, it's mission pretty much accomplished on Fender's part. As well as sticking to the Jazzmaster's classic silhouette, the body is no thicker than a standard offset, while every aspect of the neck and fretboard is very much electric. Except, that is, for the coated 0.011-0.052 phosphor-bronze strings, complete with a wound G essential for that natural acoustic tone.

Chasing waterfalls: the SIRS soundport assists the Jazzmaster's acoustic projection



Water's edge: the Ocean Turquoise finish and purfling is printed rather than sprayed

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,879 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Acoustic-electric hybrid guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Hollow mahogany body with spruce top and SIRS soundport, bolt-on mahogany neck with Micro-Tilt adjustment, 12" radius ebony fingerboard with 22 narrow tall frets and Graph Tech Tusq nut
HARDWARE Staggered-height sealed tuners, ebony Modern Asymmetrical bridge
ELECTRICS Master volume and 'Mod' A/B blending control, five-way mode switch; bridge humbucker, Fishman under-saddle piezo and internal body sensor
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 23.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36.5mm at nut, 53.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.6kg/5.8lb
FINISH Ocean Turquoise (as reviewed), Tobacco Sunburst, Tungsten, Arctic White, Natural
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT fender.com

IN USE

We're going to play this guitar acoustically and we're going to slam it through an amp, but most importantly we're going to record it via an audio interface so that we can listen back through monitors without having to worry about any spillage of unplugged tones from the instrument itself.

Not that there's much wrong with those unplugged tones. This is the biggest Acoustasonic yet in terms of internal volume, which has given Fender the chance to try larger virtual body shapes – and also helps the Jazzmaster ring out with ample power as a lightweight bedroom strummer. Of course it can't provide anything like the low-end warmth you'd get from a full-depth acoustic, but, as a bright and spanky accompaniment to your evening warbles, it should be more than adequate.

In position one on the blade selector with the Mod dial fully anti-clockwise, we're greeted by an immediately likeable rosewood dreadnought. There's a hint of that plasticky

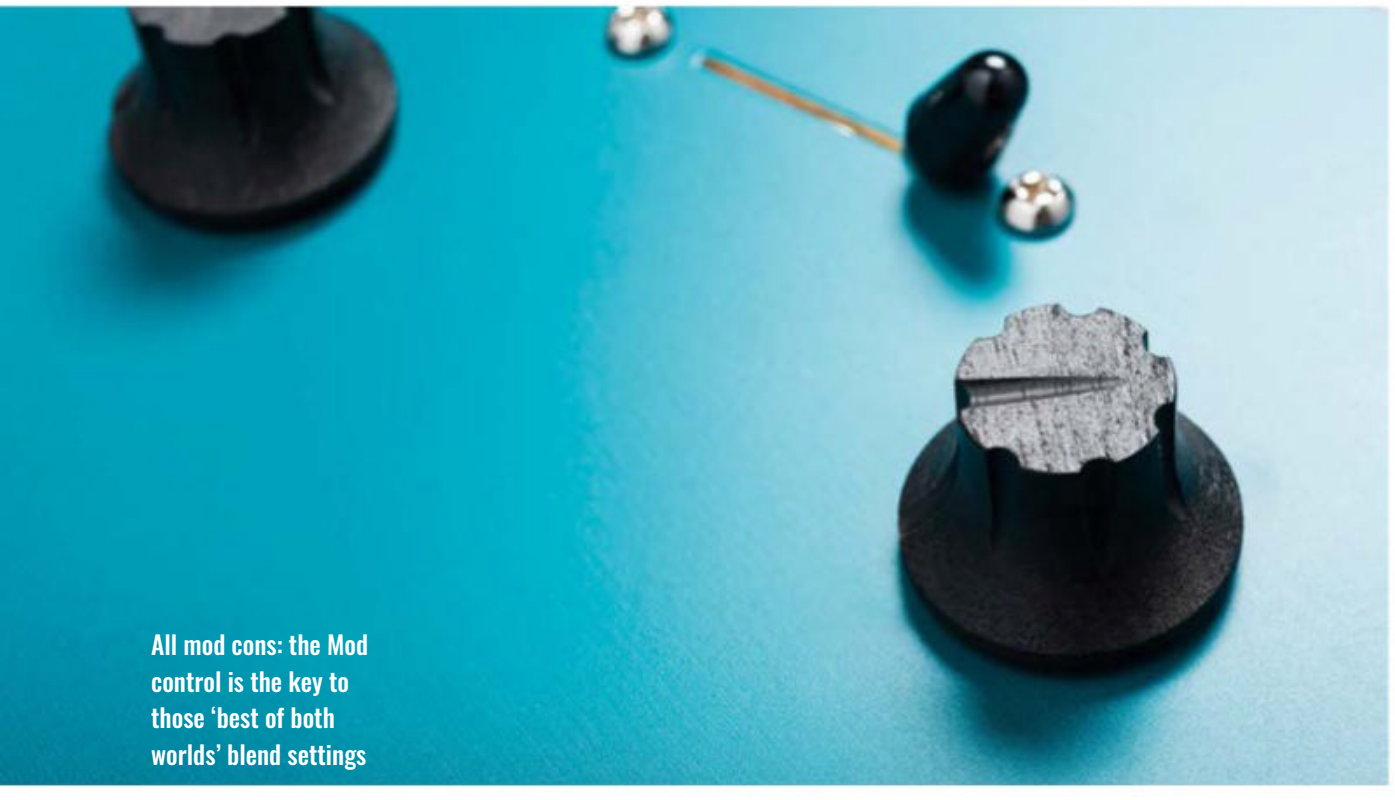
Access all areas: the heel design is softened on the treble side to aid upper-fret access

Lead the charge: you get around 20 hours of playing time after charging via micro USB

piezo brittleness when you hit a chord hard, but this is a warm, open, breezy strummer that should appeal to strident singer-songwriters. When we wind round to the other end of the Mod control, our dreadnought becomes a mahogany slope-shouldered guitar in the style of a Gibson J-45. As we exchange that full-frequency response for something much more dry and mid-focused, the difference is stark but it's no less convincing.

The real secret weapon of Fender's Acoustasonic concept, though, is the ability to dial in 'best of both worlds' settings between the extremes of the Mod dial. In this case, that means a broad palette of large-bodied acoustics, with the added bonus that you seem to get a fuller bass response across the middle section of the blending zone than you do from either model on its own.

Three amigos: the humbucker, piezo and body sensor combine to offer huge versatility



All mod cons: the Mod control is the key to those 'best of both worlds' blend settings

Position two offers two more mahogany types: a whopping jumbo and a small-bodied picker inspired by the wondrous Guild M-20. Fender has cheekily put a huge guitar and a tiny one on the same switch setting here, which really gives the Mod dial a lot of ground to cover. The smaller model demands to be fingerpicked and its woody intimacy makes the jumbo sound quite distant and slow in comparison. But, once again, the blends are absolutely worth exploring.

The rosewood auditorium model in position three is billed as a more modern hi-fi sound and we're not going to argue – as an all-rounder, this might be the pick of the bunch. The other end of the Mod dial here adds the body-sensor pickup for more percussive tones, the obvious use being to loop a finger-thumping drum pattern then play over it with a different setting; this works fine but you might find that the in-between sounds with just a little bit of body sensor work even better.

Right, we've come to the intriguing bit… and it's not what we were expecting. If your idea of lo-fi is early Elliott Smith or Sebadoh, be prepared to embrace a very different definition of the term: this is such a pure piezo sound that it's almost too hi-fi, with the strangely slappy quality of a 1980s Ovation. It's far from seductive on its own but it's not bad as a platform for adding effects, including the overdrive introduced by turning the Mod knob to blend in the humbucker.

That humbucker is an interesting proposition. In the last blade position, you hear it on its own – with the Mod control adding raucous JCM800-style dirt – and this is where the line between acoustic and electric gets truly hazy. Yes, it sounds like a (somewhat aggressive) electric guitar but there's a distinctly acoustic feel to the attack/decay envelope that takes us in a subtly different direction. Add effects or even an amp and you might conclude that this bridge between two guitar worlds is an enticing and potentially creative place to hang out.

9/10 **The coolest-looking Acoustasonic yet… and it has the tones to match**

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Fender American Acoustasonic Stratocaster **£1,779**
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Handcrafted Guitar

EASTMAN
T486 GOLDBURST

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

Is this keenly priced thinline semi from Eastman as smooth as its gloss nitrocellulose finish?

Though Eastman's elegantly distressed Antique Varnish instruments typically dominate the conversation, over at the brand's Beijing facility you'll also find guitars dressed in pristine nitrocellulose being made by hand on the same old-school production line. One such instrument is the T486, available in Goldburst for summer 2021 and priced competitively when you consider its lacquer finish, figured maple, name-brand pickups and hardshell case.

Imprecision is an inevitable consequence of building guitars by hand and to a price. But although there are one or two areas that could be neater, this is still one of the most cleanly executed builds we've seen from Eastman to date. A glance through the bass-side f-hole reveals that only the outward-facing layers of the maple laminate are figured but the centre-joined top and back are impressively flamed nonetheless, with the figuring and sunburst themes continuing around the sides.

Ivoroid binding and multi-ply purfling on the body, neck and headstock combine with pearl split-parallelogram inlays to underscore the sense of luxury. The three-piece maple neck's slim-but-not-skinny profile is a comfortable soft-shouldered carve typical of the brand, while domed, nib-free fret-ends and a polished ebony fingerboard ensure the utmost fluidity, and the generous 44.3mm nut width guarantees plenty of room to execute those expensive jazz chords.

Peeping through the treble-side f-hole reveals a centre-block made from a sandwich of mahogany and maple, with a 'window' beneath the bridge pickup that will greatly ease wiring maintenance and pickup swaps. It's highly unlikely that will be required in the short term, however, as the T486 comes loaded with Seymour Duncan's perennial combination of '59 (bridge) and Jazz (neck) humbuckers.

IN USE

The bridge may be screwed into bushings rather than directly into the body but there's a snap and vibrancy to the T486's unplugged voice that gives the impression it's straining at the leash and desperate to be amplified. Compared to our reference ES-335, the Eastman has more zing and jangle – perhaps to be expected from a maple neck and ebony 'board – while the Gibson is a little woodier and mellower, with more of the slightly banjo-like plunkiness so often exhibited by instruments such as this.

When we strap on and plug in, we find that, in terms of tone and tuning, the Eastman has a confidence-inspiring stability. The vintage-style Ping tuners are smooth and precise too. In fact, were gigs a possibility,

Under the bridge: the tune-o-matic bridge is screwed into bushings rather than directly into the body

Close to the edge: even the five-ply pickguard boasts ivoroid binding

we'd yank this thing straight out of its box and head for the nearest music venue without making adjustments. And before you whip out your soldering iron and install the PAF replicas du jour, it's worth remembering that brands such as Seymour Duncan know a thing or two about making great pickups.

Although it wears its inspiration on its beautifully figured sleeve, thanks to the presence of the '59 and Jazz 'buckers, the T486 has a flavour all of its own. Notes ring crystal clear and bell-like but with an even decay and an almost produced quality that makes this a fabulous tool for exploring chord melodies and indulging in a more considered approach.

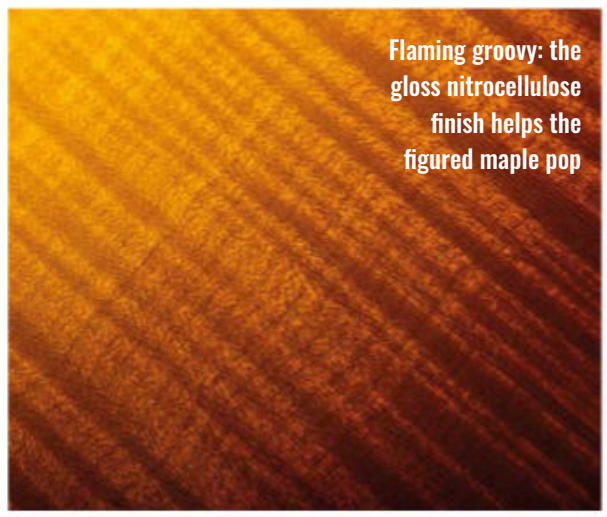
The taper of the volume controls is relatively steep but the smoother tone-control roll-off gives you plenty of scope for expression. It has power and bite, and it can certainly do the gonzoid edge-of-feedback stuff too, but that almost seems like a guilty pleasure considering the sophistication on offer. ES-335-style guitars have featured in

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,279 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow 6-string electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Maple laminate top, back and sides with mahogany/maple centre-block and ivoroid binding. 3-piece maple neck with additional 'wings', bound ebony headstock veneer and ebony fingerboard with 12" radius, pearl inlays, 22 Jescar 47104 frets, bone nut, single-action truss rod
HARDWARE Tune-o-matic bridge, Gotoh stop tailpiece, Ping vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan Jazz (neck) and '59 (bridge) humbucking pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 44.3mm at nut, 53.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.4mm at first fret, 22.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 37.3mm at nut, 51.6mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.61kg/7.98lb
FINISH Goldburst gloss nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Classic, Red
OPTIONS The T486B (£1,369) comes with a Bigsby B7 and Seymour Duncan Phat Cat single-coils. The dot-neck, plain-top T386 is £1,049
CONTACT eastmanguitars.com

Slam Dunc: the Seymour Duncan pickups offer flavourful tones

Split decision: pearl split-parallelogram inlays offer another touch of class



Flaming groovy: the gloss nitrocellulose finish helps the figured maple pop

just about every musical context imaginable but Eastman's T486 seems to lean further towards Molly Miller's end of the spectrum than Marcus King's. G

9/10 **A cultured and versatile performer ideal for jazz-infused Instagram wunderkinds**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Inspired By Gibson ES-335 Figured **£549**
D'Angelico Premier DC **£719**
Yamaha SA2200 **£1,699**

LaJz

HERITAGE
CUSTOM CORE H-150

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Could this Custom Shop incarnation of the Heritage H-150 be the Kalamazoo brand's finest solidbody to date?

Even set against the bizarre backdrop of the tail-end of Henry Juszkiewicz's reign at Gibson, there was widespread astonishment in the guitar world when in 2017 the Nashville company parted ways with the internationally respected Edwin Wilson after 28 years of loyal service. As Gibson Custom's Historic program manager, Wilson masterminded both the Collector's Choice and True Historic lines, and there aren't many people in the business who know more about Les Pauls or how to manufacture them.

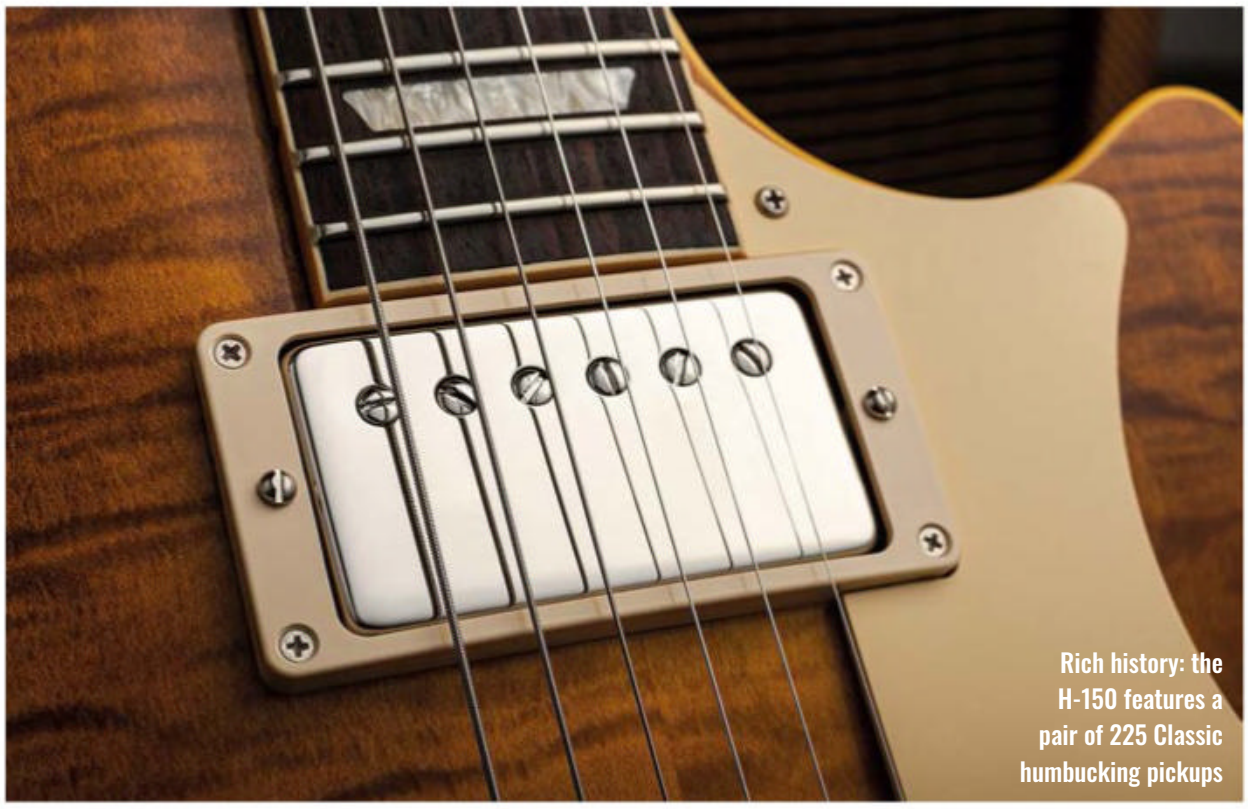
In his new role as head of guitar R&D at Heritage, Wilson has applied his expertise to instruments built at 225 Parsons Street in Kalamazoo, Michigan – the site of the golden-era Gibson factory, where Heritage was established in 1985 by former Gibson employees who didn't wish to relocate with the company to Tennessee. Full disclosure: Heritage has a global sales and marketing partnership with BandLab Technologies, which owns *Guitar.com* and this magazine.

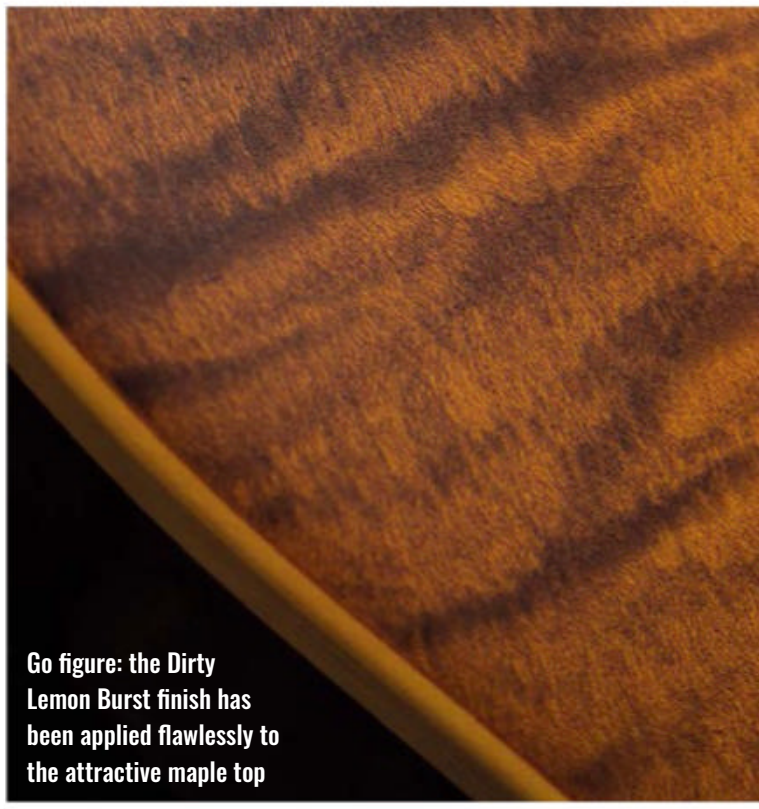
Although it resembles a standard-line H-150, our review guitar features a variety of subtle tweaks to both its specifications and its production processes. The revised top carve was inspired by a 1959 Les Paul with a flatter-than-usual shape that Wilson felt conformed to people's expectations, and making this work required a slight alteration to the body shape. The dimensions for the neck profile, meanwhile, were taken from laser scans of another 1959 Burst with a particularly comfortable neck.

Getting the bridge and tailpiece in precisely the right places also proved important, and Wilson changed the peghead shape because he feels that it balances better with the body when it's a little less long and skinny. The Custom Core models also have a holly headstock veneer with a pearl logo and twin arrow inlay. Heritage's laser-etched die-cast tuners were deemed to suit the headstock shape and the more modern aesthetic of the H-150 better than vintage-style units.

The Custom Core H-150's fretboard is rosewood and features acrylic inlays with a traditional swirl pattern. The fretboards on this model are also a little thinner, so they are closer to those of 1950s guitars, and the fretboard binding has been reduced to 0.04 inches. With the edge rolling, when viewed from the front, the binding appears as a thin line, and it's a look we prefer to that of the standard-line model.

Wilson also added some dimension to the heel, so in cross section it looks very similar to a 1950s guitar, with a half-inch drop and a height of about 0.7 inches. The headstock is pitched at 17 degrees and the cutaway has been subtly altered to make the Fijian mahogany body more symmetrical.

The nickel-plated hardware includes a locking aluminium bridge with 8/32-inch steel posts that go deep into the body, just like those of a vintage guitar. The thumbwheel and tailpiece are aluminium too, with long steel bushings and studs. The finish is nitrocellulose and the maple top and Dirty Lemon Burst finish on our review guitar are flawless. If you like your guitars a little less pristine, that's no problem. You can plump for the Artisan Aged version (£4,299), on which the ageing is carried out by another former Gibson Custom employee with several decades of experience.

Rich history: the H-150 features a pair of 225 Classic humbucking pickups



Go figure: the Dirty Lemon Burst finish has been applied flawlessly to the attractive maple top

Hats off: the H-150 comes equipped with a quartet of vintage-style top-hat knobs

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £3,799 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Fijian mahogany body with bookmatched figured maple cap, set mahogany neck, holly peghead veneer, bound rosewood fretboard with 12" radius, acrylic trapezoid inlays, 22 Jescar medium-jumbo frets, bone nut
HARDWARE Nickel-plated locking aluminium tune-o-matic bridge and aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Heritage die-cast tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Heritage Custom Shop 225 Classic humbucking pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 43.2mm at nut, 52.9mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.1mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.9mm at nut, 50.6mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.9kg/8.7lb
LEFT HANDERS No
FINISH Dirty Lemon Burst (as reviewed), Dark Cherry Sunburst, Tobacco Sunburst gloss nitrocellulose
CONTACT heritageguitars.com

Finally, Edwin applied his knowledge of vintage Gibson pickups to design the Heritage 225 Classic humbuckers sported by our review guitar. They're matched with CTS potentiometers and 0.022uF Orange Drop tone capacitors, and wired 1950s-style. You can read about how the pickups were developed in our accompanying interview on p88.

IN USE

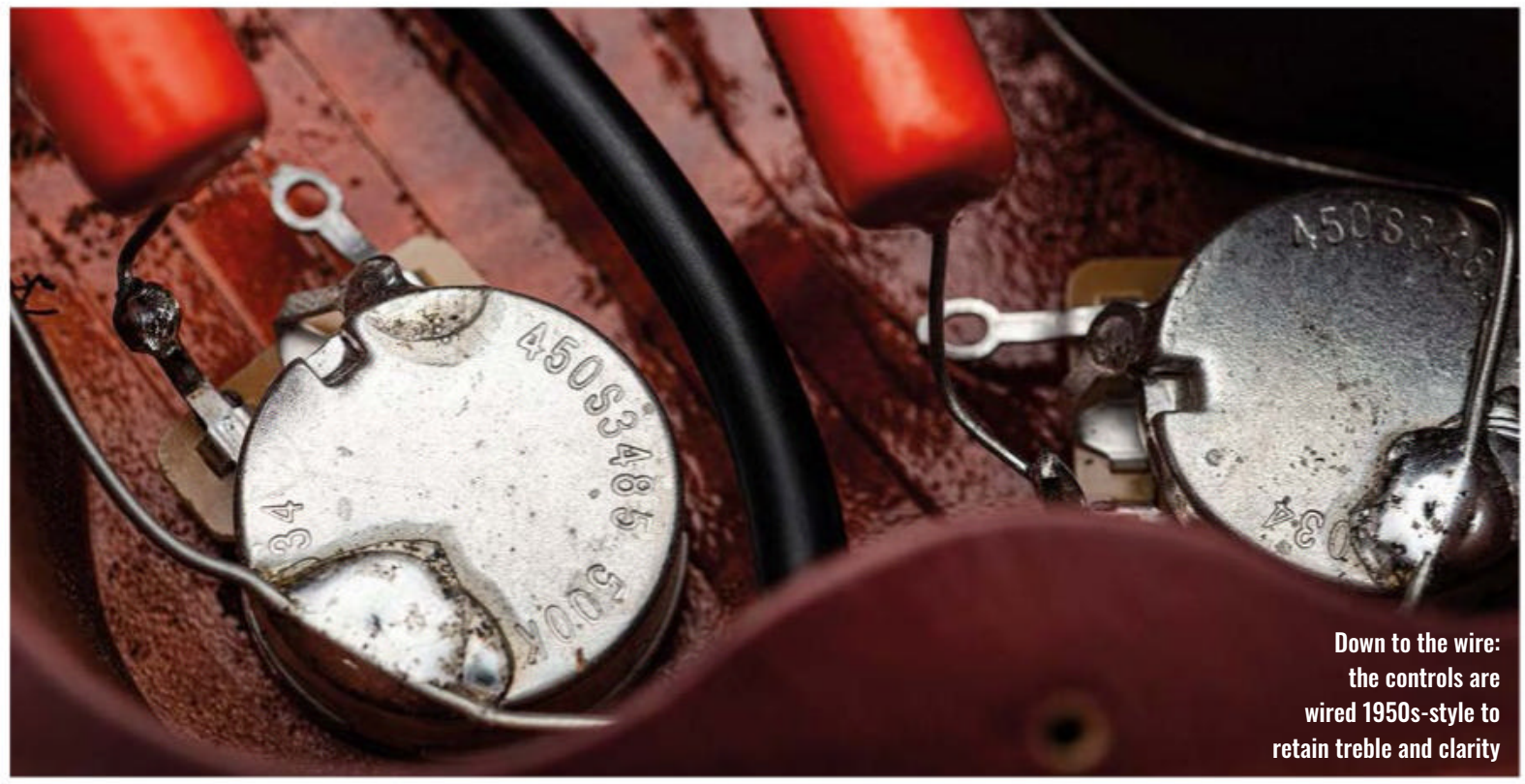
The neck profile is a fairly fat C that's closer to our experience of 1958 than '59 Les Paul profiles. It's a comfortable carve but may lack a little refinement compared to the subtle V shapes and softer shoulders of some vintage and Custom Shop Gibsons. However, the 'board edges have been rolled expertly and the fretwork and nibs executed superbly.

Wilson specifies a weight limit for the Custom Core bodies and, even with die-cast tuners, the H-150's weight feels absolutely ideal. The unplugged tone is very encouraging, with excellent string-to-string balance, open treble and warm midrange. The bass response is perhaps a little rolled off but it's clear that there's no shortage of sustain here.

Plugging into an amplifier, the H-150's pickups showcase a convincingly PAF-like midrange voicing. The bridge unit has that slightly quacky honk, while the neck pickup provides a vocal-sounding contrast with a rounded tonal purity. The middle position offers another distinct tone, with a scooped midrange that develops a funky, phasey quality as the neck's volume control is dialled back.

With Alnico III magnets, the tone is sweeter and smoother than it would likely be were the pickups loaded with Alnico Vs, and the output is a little lower. If you are inclined towards high gain and high volume, this cultured character combines with the wax potting to make things easy on the ear.

The flipside is the way that potting reduces microphony. While it hasn't been eliminated altogether in the 225 Classics,



Down to the wire: the controls are wired 1950s-style to retain treble and clarity

On the tail: the aluminium tailpiece features nicely rounded edges

Switch it up: the Switchcraft toggle's amber tip looks the part

they're not as open and clear in the trebles as vintage PAFs and the most slavishly accurate replicas. Consequently, we struggle to attain the breathy detail and vintage-style shifting harmonic bloom that's part of the PAF magic. Bear this in mind if you mostly play at home or gig with low-to-medium-powered amps.

Fortunately, the controls interact with the pickups much like a vintage wiring harness, with clarity remaining as you turn down the volume. We also like the tone pot taper, and the Custom Core can do that vintage Les Paul trick where you can turn down a volume control and then tighten the lows by rolling back the tone controls.

The 'Edwin effect' is clear to see and, in this Custom Core guise, the H-150 is no longer a worthy but unremarkable single-cut solidbody. Minor gripes include side dots that look slightly oddly placed in the fretboard binding, and a neck profile that may've benefitted from a bit more finesse. And, even if we do understand the thinking behind potting the coils, we feel the wax is slightly subduing a fine set of pickups. Ultimately though, Heritage has taken a huge step forward with this model. The Custom Core H-150 is a very impressive and exciting instrument indeed.

9/10 **A premium single-cut that plays flawlessly, sounds excellent and is competitively priced**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson Custom 1959 Les Paul Standard Reissue **£5,699**
Eastman SB59 **£1,639**
PRS McCarty 594 **£3,699**

"IT'S NOT ABOUT SOUNDING LIKE ANOTHER GUITAR. IT'S ABOUT GIVING YOU THE TOOLS YOU NEED TO CREATE THE SOUNDS YOU WANT"

MR 225

Heritage's Edwin Wilson tells us about the Custom Core H-150 and his deep dive into the history of PAF pickups

How does your role as head of guitar R&D at Heritage differ from what you've done in the past?

"With Gibson, my focus was making guitars that were as close to a historical reference as possible. But with Heritage, it's more about what the idea of Heritage really is. The guitars are good but they need some work, and the main model we discussed was the H-150.

"Guitars have been made at 225 Parsons since the 1900s. There has never been a time when guitars were not made in this building. When I think about those guitars and the things about them that are super-important, it helps me get a clear picture about what I feel the H-150 should be.

"Arguably the greatest production guitars in history – and the most collectable – were made here, and there are things about their construction that I felt Heritage needed to capture. My background made it easy to figure out what those things were. But the harder part was figuring out how to introduce those things back into the production process."

Have you made many changes on the factory floor?

"There's a lot of things at Heritage where it's hands-on processes that maybe shouldn't be as hands-on. Setting up tooling and machinery to build these guitars was also part of the task. I had to figure out at what point we want to make something the function of a machine or a person.

"We do the bodies and necks on the CNC machine to get consistency. But everything from the final sanding to the neck rolling is still done by hand. The tops get slack-belted and the necks are hand-fitted. Anybody who is concerned about us using CNC machines rather than hand-building is crazy. We give ourselves plenty of opportunities to screw things up!"

Tell us more about the inspiration behind the Custom Core H-150.

"I thought about the things that people are attached to about vintage Les Pauls and reissues, like the top carve, neck profile, heel shape and holly head veneer. We thought about how to apply those things and started from scratch. We're making our own guitar, a guitar that, if Gibson had never left Parsons Street, the Les Paul might have evolved into."

How did you approach the 225 Classic pickups?

"When I was at Gibson, I was complaining about the pickups and they told me, 'Just make PAFs, take your time and do it right'. I went through all the company records, found every parts vendor, the names of every person who worked in the machine shop, original drawings, everything related to PAF manufacture. Some of the people I talked to had kept records, including the company that made the enamel wire. I spoke to a woman who remembered selling wire to Gibson in the 1950s. The company no longer made the same wire but they were so excited about the project that they offered to make it again.

"Because Gibson is a big company, they let me buy six vintage PAFs. I sent the magnets out to a laboratory to get them analysed – four of them were Alnico III, one was IV and the other was II. In Gibson's records, they always ordered Alnico II.

"That was confirmed when I sent them to a magnet manufacturer. They told me it was a bit of random at that time because if Gibson ordered a box with 5,000 alnico II magnets, there would be III, IV and V magnets in there too. PAFs were made with the whole range. So, I went through all of this and we were finally ready for Gibson to start making PAFs again. Then Henry [Juszkiewicz] said, 'It's a waste of time, we're not doing it'.

"I chose Alnico III [for the 225 Classics] because my research showed it's correct. The Custom Buckers that I did for Gibson were loosely based on Jimmy Page's pickups and the 225 Classics are a bit more like his, with a little lower output, plain enamel 42 AWG wire, potted mismatched coils and Alnico III magnets. It's not about sounding like another guitar but giving you the tools you need to create the sounds you want."

Find out more at heritageguitars.com

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GUILD
STARFIRE I JET90

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Fresh from Guild's vintage-inspired Newark St Collection, could this retro hot-rod be the leader of the pack?

Despite space-age model names such as Starfire and Jetstar, Guild's Newark St Collection has long been a destination for those with vintage predilections and down-to-earth budgets. From hard-rockin' solidbodies to hollowbody archtops, the range accounts for all the main food groups. Our review model combines the classic single-cut Starfire outline with a centre-block, a trio of Guild's Franz P-90s and a Bigsby-style vibrato tailpiece.

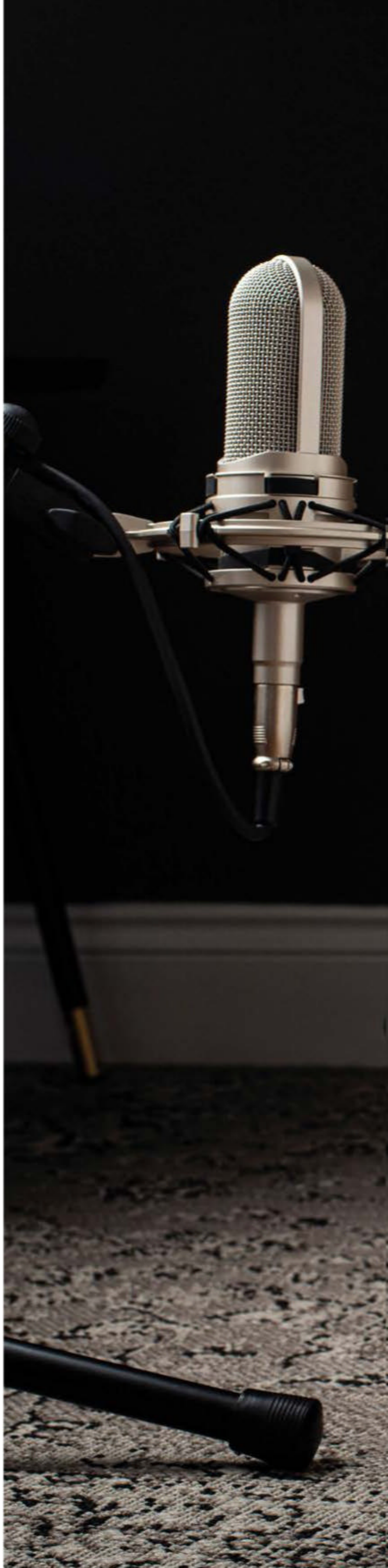
Seen here in Satin White polyurethane, the Jet90 is certainly a looker, and the Satin Black and dark-backed Satin Gold incarnations are no less attractive. With a 16.5-inch lower bout and an elongated Firebird-style six-in-line headstock outline first used by Guild back in the 1960s, it's an imposing instrument that makes a lot more sense on our 6'2" frame than it might on that of a shorter player.

Big-boned it may be but this Starfire's mahogany centre-block is chambered and its tailpiece lightweight aluminium, so it's unlikely you'll find the guitar's weight to be a drag factor. It balances superbly on a strap too, and hangs in a natural playing position. With its arched laminated-maple top and back with ivory ABS binding and two-ply purfling, the construction is broadly 335-like and therefore there's no reason to expect a shortage of sustain. In fact, the centre-block-anchored bridge, screwed-down tension-bar-equipped tailpiece and unimpeded string-path behind the nut combine to offer sustain and stability in abundance.

Alongside the binding, the Indian rosewood 'board is also bound in ivory ABS (that's acrylonitrile butadiene styrene, to its friends; a thermoplastic polymer which in addition to beautifying guitars is currently finding favour in the world of 3D printing), with 5mm pearloid dots providing a understated counterpoint to the flourishes elsewhere. These include the stepped Art Deco pickguard and its retro logo, the G-logo mirror knobs, and the old-school indicator pins around the six-position rotary pickup-selector switch.

Though Newark St instruments are built in South Korea, Indonesia and China at the behest of Guild's California-based owners Córdoba Music Group, the range itself is named after the location of Guild's former Hoboken, New Jersey factory. It was here that many of its vintage models were manufactured before the company was sold to the Avnet Corporation in 1965. In 1966, Guild operations were relocated to Rhode Island, where they would remain until the facility was shut down by the company's then-owners Fender in 2001.

The aforementioned Franz P-90s offer another link to the first boom era of electric guitar production. Original Franz pickups were manufactured in Astoria, Queens, and featured on many of Guild's 1950s models. Under the hood, the modern repros on our review guitar clearly aren't off-the-peg units and, though they are similar, they sport some notable anatomical differences to Gibson-style P-90s.



Pin sharp: the rotary pickup selector's six positions are marked with vintage-style indicator pins

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £599
DESCRIPTION 6-string semi-hollow single-cutaway electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Laminated maple body with chambered mahogany centre-block, set mahogany neck with bound 12.5" radius Indian rosewood fingerboard. 20 narrow-tall frets, dual-action truss-rod, composite nut
HARDWARE Nickel-plated anchored tune-o-matic bridge, aluminium Guild vibrato tailpiece, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 3x Guild Franz P-90 Soapbar pickups, master volume, master tone, six-position rotary pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.1mm at first fret, 23.6mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 34.4mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.53kg/7.8lb
LEFT-HANDERS No but see website for left-handed options elsewhere in the range
FINISH Satin White (as reviewed), Satin Black, Satin Gold
CONTACT guildguitars.com

Undo the single centre-screw to remove one of the pickup covers and you'll notice that the corners of the top and bottom of the bobbins have been removed. This was originally done to avoid any snagging when winding. The pickups are anchored to the body via a screw in each corner of the base plate, and the plate itself is folded, with a lip on each long side helping to hold a pair of bar magnets in place. Scope for pickup-height adjustment is limited but thanks to the foam pad beneath each unit, there is at least some room for manoeuvre. Thankfully, plugging in reveals that the balance between all three pickups was set optimally before this guitar left the factory.

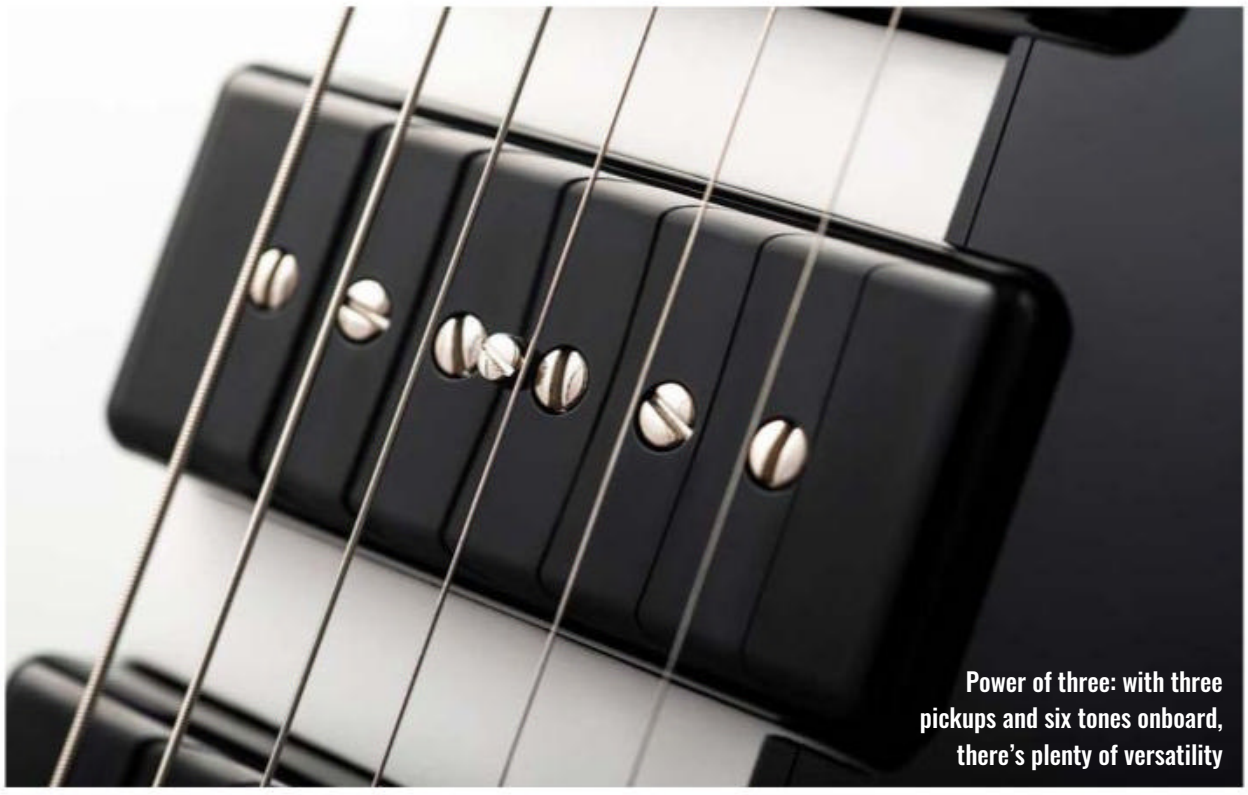
IN USE

The 'modern thin U' neck shape is slim but not off-putting and, though its slightly flat-backed carve is a little generic, it's unlikely to scare anyone away and there's plenty to grapple with at the body end. Importantly, the fingerboard binding and fret ends feel nicely rounded and there are no sharp edges. The nut slots have been cut a little on the high side but, if that bothers you, just be mindful that it's easier to rectify than if they were too deep.

Though we've read reports of slightly flimsy tuners and soft vibrato springs in reviews of this model elsewhere, we can only comment on the guitar in front of us and neither issue has reared its head here. Indeed, the firm-but-not-stiff spring tension, optimal bar angle and expressive overall feel of the vibrato resides firmly in the Goldilocks zone and is as good as we've experienced from many modern USA-made Bigsby units. As we mentioned previously, sustain is long and well balanced and, even before you plug in, the loud acoustic voice and shifting harmonics promise plenty of fireworks, with no danger of running out of gas when amplified.

Through our tweed combo, the bridge pickup is spiteful and nasal just like a great bridge P-90 should be. Digging in hard, there's plenty to love for fans of early Kinks, prime-era Neil Young and Jack White.

Compared to our late 1960s Gibson ES-330, the Guild has more output and heft, and it's altogether more solidbody-like in tone – no surprise given that the Guild's Franz pickups are screwed into a section of mahogany and our Gibson is fully hollow.

Position two's hum-cancelling combo of the bridge and middle pickups introduces more single-coil sparkle and twang, and the tone is rather more Gretsch-like, perfect for those early Beatles or *Last Train To Clarksville*-style jangle-pop moments.

Power of three: with three pickups and six tones onboard, there's plenty of versatility

Step it up: the stepped Art Deco pickguard boasts Guild's 'Freedom Wing' logo

Light touch: the tailpiece is made of lightweight aluminium

Position three (middle only) firms things up again and is a superb lead and rhythm tone in its own right, offering a muscular contrast to the springier hum-cancelling neck-and-bridge setting in position six.

Indeed, it's when we're in that third position that we lose the most time to atmospheric noodling, embroidered by smoky reverb, throbbing tremolo and judicious dips of the whammy bar. This quickly swerves into spy-movie soundtrack and rockabilly territory in position four (neck and middle), where the Gretsch-like flavour returns. Position five is another noodler's haven, with the neck pickup in standalone mode able to deliver a blend of smoothness and bite that begs you to throw that pick down and begin exploring its dynamic range with your fingers.

Transitioning from one sound to another doesn't create too much of an audible thunk but there's no doubt that the pickup selector switch doesn't have the ease of use and the simple visual recognition of blade and toggle designs. Initially, at least, you might find that you lose your bearings in the heat of battle; from a player's perspective, it can be tough to tell at a glance whether you're in position one or two, as the knob itself masks those marker pins from view.

Middle-position pickups with tall covers can be kryptonite for some players, but this is not something we've ever had to adjust our playing technique to compensate for. In fact, we tend to file this concern in the folder entitled 'parallel universe problems', next to such strange worries as disliking Telecasters and having tuning issues with Bigsbys.

However, people who struggle with three-pickup guitars do walk among us, even if they're unlikely to have made it as far into this review as the penultimate paragraph.

These ergonomic concerns aside, there are very few negatives here. The Starfire I Jet90 oozes rock 'n' roll and, for just £599 and with the grand old Guild name on its elegant headstock, it's almost impossible to argue with. G

9/10 **There are plenty of affordable semis but few possess as much character and charisma as this**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Riviera Custom P93 **£549**
Gretsch G2622T-P90 Streamliner Center Block **£609**
Fender Noventa Jazzmaster **£889**

Taylor

TAYLOR
GT K21E

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

This handsome Hawaiian koa model lends a little luxury to Taylor's compact Grand Theater line

Has it really been a decade since Andy Powers arrived at Taylor? Throughout the past 10 years, the master guitar designer has given the brand's builds and sonics a gentle but firm evolutionary push and introduced a range of new models with future-facing attitudes towards bracing and voicing. The compact Grand Theater form factor arrived in late 2020 with scaled-down curves from Taylor's Grand Orchestra and new C-Class bracing – an asymmetrical, cantilevered design developed to wring every drop of bass out of a smaller body while providing the intonation benefits of Powers' game-changing V-Class architecture.

Made from solid woods at Taylor's El Cajon facility near San Diego, the GT debuted in Urban Ash and Sitka spruce. For 2021, the options have been expanded to include East Indian rosewood and Sitka spruce on the 811 model (available in both acoustic and electrified versions for £3,155 and £3,335, respectively), as well as Hawaiian koa for the back, sides and soundboard of our gloss-finished review model, the sumptuous K21e.

Scale length plays a fundamental role in a guitar's personality, both in terms of how it feels and how it sounds. With comfort being one of the most crucial factors in the GT's design, Powers drew inspiration from the more approachable and looser feel you get with an instrument that's tuned to E flat. Thus, the GT's scale length is equivalent to a guitar with a 25.5-inch scale tuned to E flat and capo'd at the first fret, which results in an instrument with a 24.125-inch (613mm) scale with slightly condensed fret spacing.

The GT's compact body certainly feels comfortable and well-balanced on the lap and the koa, while not the most dramatic set we've seen, has an elegant chatoyance that's emphasised by the glossy sunburst finish and framed beautifully by the rock-maple binding. The back is a symmetrical four-piece 'Simons wedge' construction, named after its creator, Spanish luthier Jorge Simons from Madinter, one of Taylor's wood suppliers.

In keeping with the scaled-down theme, the GT features a 14-fret tropical-mahogany neck with a 1-23/32-inch nut width and a subtle hint of a V-shape in its welcoming profile. The neck is capped with a West African Crelicam ebony fingerboard and replete with a maple Spring Vine inlay, while the reappearance of the sunburst finish, this time in satin, on the heel and the back of the headstock is an especially nice touch. As is to be expected from Taylor, the fretwork is immaculate.

Taylor's compact T5z headstock is fitted here with a set of Antique Gold Gotoh 510 1:18 tuners – the industry standard for acoustic guitars at the posh end of the spectrum. Fittingly, these are the mini versions, and while their performance is smooth and rock solid, players with larger hands may find them fiddly.

All-koa guitars have been the choice of many acoustic connoisseurs since the 1920s with the wood appealing both visually and sonically, with an understandably heavy lean towards Hawaiian slack-key songs, which demand a more sophisticated and lively voice. Many vintage koa instruments were originally built as square-neck lap steel guitars before being converted.

Back it up: the four-piece back is a 'Simons wedge' design

Ring true: maple is also used for detailing in the soundhole rosette

Where all-mahogany guitars typically have a woody, fundamental sound well suited to blues and folk, koa instruments are prized for their breathy shimmer across the trebles, strong mids, and articulate bass response that often belies their size and makes them ideal for a wide variety of musical styles. Let's find out how this example stacks up.

IN USE

You can tell a lot from an instrument simply by handling it. On removing the K21e from its robust but travel-friendly AeroCase, it's immediately apparent that this guitar is a lively little number, which vibrates readily to our voice when speaking. This isn't the same as extraneous handling noise while playing, of course, of which there is very little thanks to the expertly applied finish.

Starting with some fingerstyle ideas in standard tuning, the GT feels quick and inviting, with that deeply pleasing koa shimmer present and correct on the unwound strings. First-position open chords sound full, with a good overall response and sustain, although the chord decay is a little uneven, with some notes dying off quicker than others. That said, this box doesn't know it's a guitar yet so you can expect things to smooth out as the instrument ages. While the neck is comfortable for chord work, with the profile filling the hand nicely, it is tangibly a little slimmer than a 1-3/4-inch carve.

Logic dictates that any instrument without a scratchplate isn't intended to be attacked with the sort of brutal enthusiasm with which we approach this guitar in the name of scientific investigation. However, the GT stands up admirably to our pick assault, only tapping out and losing clarity when we really dig in hard. This could be as much a consequence of the looser string tension as the wood choice and, of course, if you're looking for headroom, then bigger bodies with spruce tops aren't exactly uncommon in the Taylor catalogue.

Dropping into DADGAD, we are met by a rich and immediately inspiring voice that encourages expressive playing. The bass is full, which might be ascribed as much to the size of the guitar – which encourages a playing posture that keeps a gap between the player and the instrument, leaving the back free to vibrate – as to its C-Class bracing. The string spacing now, however, for both the fretting and the picking hand, feels slightly cramped, especially on the

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £5,159 (inc AeroCase)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD C-Class braced koa soundboard, koa back and sides. Tropical mahogany neck, ebony fretboard, bridge and bridge pins. Maple inlays and binding. 20 frets, Tusq nut, Micarta saddles
HARDWARE Antique Gold Gotoh 510 mini tuners
ELECTRONICS Taylor Expression System 2 with treble, bass and volume controls
SCALE LENGTH 24.125"/613mm
NECK WIDTH 43.9mm at nut, 53.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 36.7mm at nut, 55.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.85kg/4.1lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Shaded Edgeburst (gloss body/satin neck)
CONTACT taylorguitars.com

Express yourself: Taylor's Expression System 2 is a dependable pickup system

In the air: the ebony 'board boasts a maple Spring Vine inlay

wound strings. While standard attacks are still accessible, we find that tapping, rest strokes and nail return techniques suffer from the rather tight proportions. It's a pity, because this is a genuinely good sound for solo players.

Taylor describes the GT model as a new category of acoustic guitar in size, feel and sound, which may sound like marketing hyperbole but is not inaccurate. The company also has a strong track record of all-koa instruments that dates back to the 1990s. Our inescapable conclusion is that, once again, Andy Powers has ably paired an established brand legacy with innovative concepts, designs and techniques to create something new, immediate and beautiful. G

8/10 **A beautiful, compact all-rounder that will do just about anything you ask of it**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Santa Cruz Firefly from **$4,450**
Brook Lyn 015 Koa **£4,895**
Lowden S-50 Koa **£TBC**

BROWNE AMPLIFICATION
PROTEIN DUAL OVERDRIVE

WORDS ED OLESZKO

There's plenty of competition out there but could this dual-overdrive stompbox become the connective tissue in your rig?

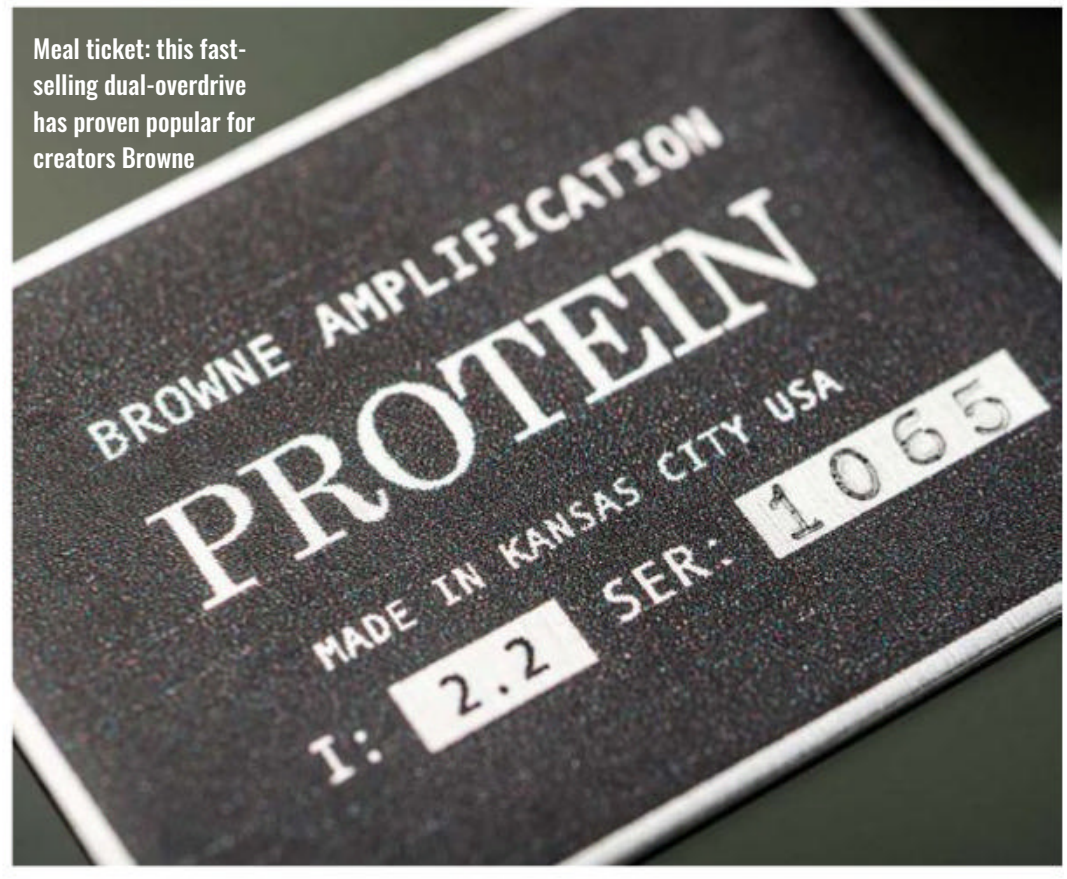
Packing two overdrives into one box has become the de rigueur format for boutique dirt units. Here, instead of opting for variations on the Klon and Tube Screamer themes, Browne Amplification has taken inspiration from the 1990s Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal so beloved by John Mayer and the Nobels ODR-1 beloved by, well, most of Nashville.

The Kansas City brand offers the Protein pedal in five colourways. Our review unit's olive-green paint job has something of a military aesthetic and it looks and feels suitably battle-ready on the outside. Internally, a couple of SMT-loaded circuit boards and a pair of simple true-bypass on/off footswitches complete the package.

Although we prefer top-mounted inputs and outputs as they maximise board space, the side-mounted jacks on the Protein come with a clever twist. By utilising TRS cables and flicking some internal switches, it's possible to separate the two overdrive sides and use them in independent loops in pedal-switching system.

With near-identical controls and no distinguishing markings, the only way to differentiate between the two sides is via the colours of their blue and green LEDs, which hint at the original circuits that inspired them. And those of you who still like to sling a couple of battery-powered pedals in your gigbag are out of luck – the Protein is mains only.

Another level: the Protein packs two canny takes on classic overdrive circuits



Meal ticket: this fast-selling dual-overdrive has proven popular for creators Browne

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £319
DESCRIPTION Dual-channel overdrive pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Blue channel: level, tone, gain. Green channel: level, tone, drive
FEATURES True-bypass switching, powered by 9V DC centre-negative adapter only
DIMENSIONS 92 x 120 x 51mm
CONTACT browneamps.com

IN USE

We kick off with the green channel, on the right. With our 1964 Strat plugged into a clean Deluxe Reverb, we're impressed by the Protein's warm, natural overdrive tones, its ample volume boost, its note definition and its touch sensitivity, even at high settings. There's less of the distinct mid hump that typifies that other famous green overdrive, and with tones ideal for modern country, Americana, slide and blues, it's no wonder that the inspiration for this side of the Protein is a go-to pedal for Nashville session cats.

Switching to the blue side, on the left, we're treated to an almost HD take on the old 1990s Marshall Bluesbreaker. There's a smooth, rich boost and low-gain overdrive with a lower-mid injection that's particularly flattering for vintage Strats. At the same time, we hear less of the somewhat woolly bass response of the original unit. The Protein's wider gain range, increased volume and clarity are a clear evolution from its origins.

Switching to a PAF-loaded Les Paul ups the velvety sustain quota and Beano, Angus and Kossoff are all there if you want them. The combination of both sides of the pedal delivers some killer lead tones too and, happily, even with both sides stacked, the background noise is impressively low.

The Protein is a tasty all-round overdrive pedal that offers something different in a market saturated by Klon and Tube Screamer clones. With a fantastic utility overdrive on the green side and a smartly refined take on the Bluesbreaker on the other, it works well with whatever combination of guitar and amplifier you throw at it. Golden Browne indeed. **G**

8/10 **With two classy voices in one superbly made unit, the Protein impresses**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Keeley D&M Drive **£229**
Analogman King Of Tone **$265**
Strymon Sunset **£249**

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Double trouble: the JAM unit features harmonic and amplitude modes

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £229
DESCRIPTION Dual-mode tremolo pedal, made in Greece
CONTROLS Depth, level, speed, mix knobs. Footswitches for double-speed and bypass. Intensity switch, mode switch, internal trim controls for effect treble, middle and bass
FEATURES True-bypass switching, powered by 9V DC power supply only
DIMENSIONS 75 x 120 x 56mm
CONTACT jampedals.com

JAM PEDALS

HARMONIOUS MONK

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Harmonic and amplitude tremolo combine in a stompbox designed in partnership with That Pedal Show

Following a successful collaboration with Robert Keeley that spawned the mega-selling D&M Drive, That Pedal Show's Mick Taylor and Dan Steinhardt have hooked up with Athens-based JAM Pedals to create a tremolo unit with two modes: harmonic and amplitude.

Most of us have used amplitude tremolo effects before, and their manipulation of signal volume at varied depths and rates has helped to conjure up some of the most atmospheric guitar tones of all time. Harmonic tremolo is likely less familiar to you, as it's rarely heard outside of Fender's early 1960s brown Super, Pro and Concert amp circuits. It's a more complex proposition, traditionally achieved by splitting the signal into separate treble and bass frequencies, modulating and panning between them, and then mixing the two back together. The result is psychedelic, woozy and utterly addictive, and its recent resurgence is no doubt thanks to exponents such as Blake Mills, Joey Landreth and Ariel Posen.

Like most JAM units, the Harmonious Monk will certainly stand out on your board. But the frivolity ends there. Input from seasoned pedal experts is apparent in the comprehensive and intuitive feature set, which includes true-bypass switching, controls for depth, speed, level and mix, and switches for intense or subtle LFO settings and amplitude or harmonic modes. Despite its compact size, the Monk even packs a second footswitch for instant speed doubling, and internal three-band EQ trimmers. Crucial for those with a wet/dry rig, the output and input are in phase.

IN USE

Plugging in with an old Strat, the all-analogue signal path and well-sorted circuit are immediately apparent thanks to a distinct lack of background noise. In the subtle setting, the amplitude tremolo provides a gorgeously rounded waveform that very much reminds us of our tweed Vibrolux's bias tremolo tones. Switching to the intense setting, there's all the rich and choppy black-panel tremolo you could want.

Having both depth and mix controls proves incredibly useful, allowing exactly the right amount of intensity to be dialled in, at all speed settings. This lets the Monk integrate gloriously and seamlessly with your core tone, be it clean or overdriven. We've already found our new favourite tremolo pedal – but there's more…

Switching to the harmonic mode gives chords and lead lines a beautiful deep throb that's rich in phasey movement and gives the aural impression of watery vibrato, despite no pitch manipulation occurring. Whether subtle or extreme, this is all our favourite bits of vibe, rotary speaker, vibrato and phaser effects rolled into one unique and exquisite modulation texture. There are hours of hypnotic modulated bliss to be found here.

Although we wish it had the option to connect an expression pedal for on-the-fly speed control, the lush swirl of the Monk's harmonic mode alone is worth the price of admission. Throw in the versatile-sounding amplitude tremolo tones and this new JAM pedal packs surely all the wobble you'll need to set you on the path towards righteous tonal nirvana.

9/10 **One great tremolo sound would be enough but two seals the deal**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Walrus Audio Monument **£179**
Supro Tremolo **$219**
Strymon Flint **£279**

EBO CUSTOMS

E-VERB STUDIO

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Thanks to a client list that includes Dan Auerbach, Vince Gill and Tom Bukovac, the valve reverb tones of Ebo Customs may have already found their way into your record collection

Following a 20-year career as a Nashville-based session guitarist, Eric Borash decided to indulge his passions for design and electrical engineering by setting up Ebo Customs in 2017. His goal? To create hand-built valve amplifiers using all-original designs and circuits. In addition to amps, the Ebo product line includes standalone valve reverb units, which have proved to be an instant hit with Nashville guitar luminaries.

The standard E-verb spring reverb unit retails for $1,650 and features a pure valve signal path with two 12AX7s and one 6V6 tube, with controls for reverb drive level, reverb tone, wet/dry mix and output gain, all housed in a road-ready amp-style head sleeve. However, requests for an E-verb optimised for studio use soon led to the development of the version we have on test. Is it worth the extra outlay?

Housed in a crisp white 3U rackmount chassis with backlit analogue meters and featuring custom Lundahl transformers, the E-verb Studio features the same all-valve signal path and spring reverb circuit as in the standard E-verb. In addition, the Studio version also includes a balanced XLR line-level (+4dBu) input and output alongside the regular 1/4-inch unbalanced instrument-level (-10dBu) I/O. There's also a pre-reverberation series TRS insert point to facilitate external reverb signal processing.

Special measures: who doesn't love a backlit VU meter?

Switching it up: the Studio unit features flexible connectivity

KEY FEATURES

PRICE $2,500
DESCRIPTION All-valve studio reverb unit, made in the USA
CONTROLS Drive, tone, mix, gain
REAR PANEL Pre-reverberation series TRS insert point, footswitch input for remote switching, unbalanced 1/4" jack and balanced XLR mono input and output, switchable chassis and audio ground lifts
DIMENSIONS 483 x 225 x 135mm
CONTACT ebocustoms.com

A footswitch can defeat the reverb if desired but your guitar signal always travels through the all-valve circuitry. Switchable chassis and audio ground lifts are welcome inclusions too.

IN USE

We plug our rosewood-'board Strat into the E-verb Studio and then into our 1951 Fender Deluxe. Setting the gain control (which is more of an output level control) to match our bypassed signal level and nudging the rest of the controls up to nine o'clock, we're floored by the rich harmonic detail of the preamp and the lush airy halo that the spring reverb adds to our tone.

Upping the drive control whisks us from subtle ambience to the classic sounds so beloved by surf-rockers and movie-score writers – thankfully without the volume drop and additional background noise that can plague vintage Fender outboard reverb units. The tone control situates the reverb trails perfectly in the mix, from dark and moody to bright and twangy, and all things in between. That gain control, meanwhile, allows you to push the front of your end with a gloriously rich valve overdrive.

How does the E-verb Studio compare to a classic amp spring reverb circuit? In a head-to-head with our 1965 Fender Deluxe Reverb, the E-verb delivers a warmer and clearer reverb decay, which is every bit as atmospheric but lacks the slightly metallic edge of the Fender. And if you want to get really creative, try using the E-verb Studio's XLR I/O to add ambience to acoustic guitars, drums, keyboards or vocals. The results can be exceptional.

There aren't many things that can improve the sound of a great guitar into a vintage tweed amp but the E-verb is one of them. As you would expect from a piece of professional studio gear, the investment is significant, so unless you need the extra connectivity of this model, we'd thoroughly recommend the more gig-friendly standard E-verb unit. Regardless of form factor, the valve warmth and lush reverb tones of the E-verb have enhanced the sonics of each and every one of our amps and guitars. We don't intend to switch it off!

9/10 **For those who are serious about analogue reverb and can accept no substitute, this is as good as it gets**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Victoria Reverberato **$1,899**
Fender '63 Tube Reverb reissue **£800** approx (used)
Surfy Industries SurfyBear Compact **£279**

INDUSTRY INSIDER

EMPRESS EFFECTS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

As one of the world's most forward-thinking makers, Empress pays no mind to technical limitations, while its pedals retain a user-friendliness that makes each unit inspiring. Here, Empress emperor Steve Bragg tells us how he was inspired by *Dookie* and about his robot aspirations

How did you get into guitar?

"My dad is a professional musician. He plays steel guitar and keyboards. We had an acoustic guitar in the house but he always kept it hidden from me. At some point, when I was in grade seven, I found it. That was the same year my friends and I all bought *Dookie*. The next move was obvious: we were compelled to start a band. We branched out a bit, covering songs by Nirvana, Radiohead, Sonic Youth and Smashing Pumpkins."

When did you start building or tinkering with effects?

"I got into hobby electronics during my high school years. I got together with a bunch of friends – of the coolest calibre, obviously – and we started trying to build a robot that would rival Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Unfortunately, I don't think we ever really got past the power supply. But we did have fun blowing up capacitors. I also started building effects when I was in high school too. They're easier than robots. My first pedal was a Tycobrahe Octavia. In university, I took electrical engineering and got into programming PICs. I actually started getting stuff to work. I thought it would be sweet to be able to control guitar effects with processors, so I started working on the Empress Tremolo."

When did you realise that you had a viable business on your hands?

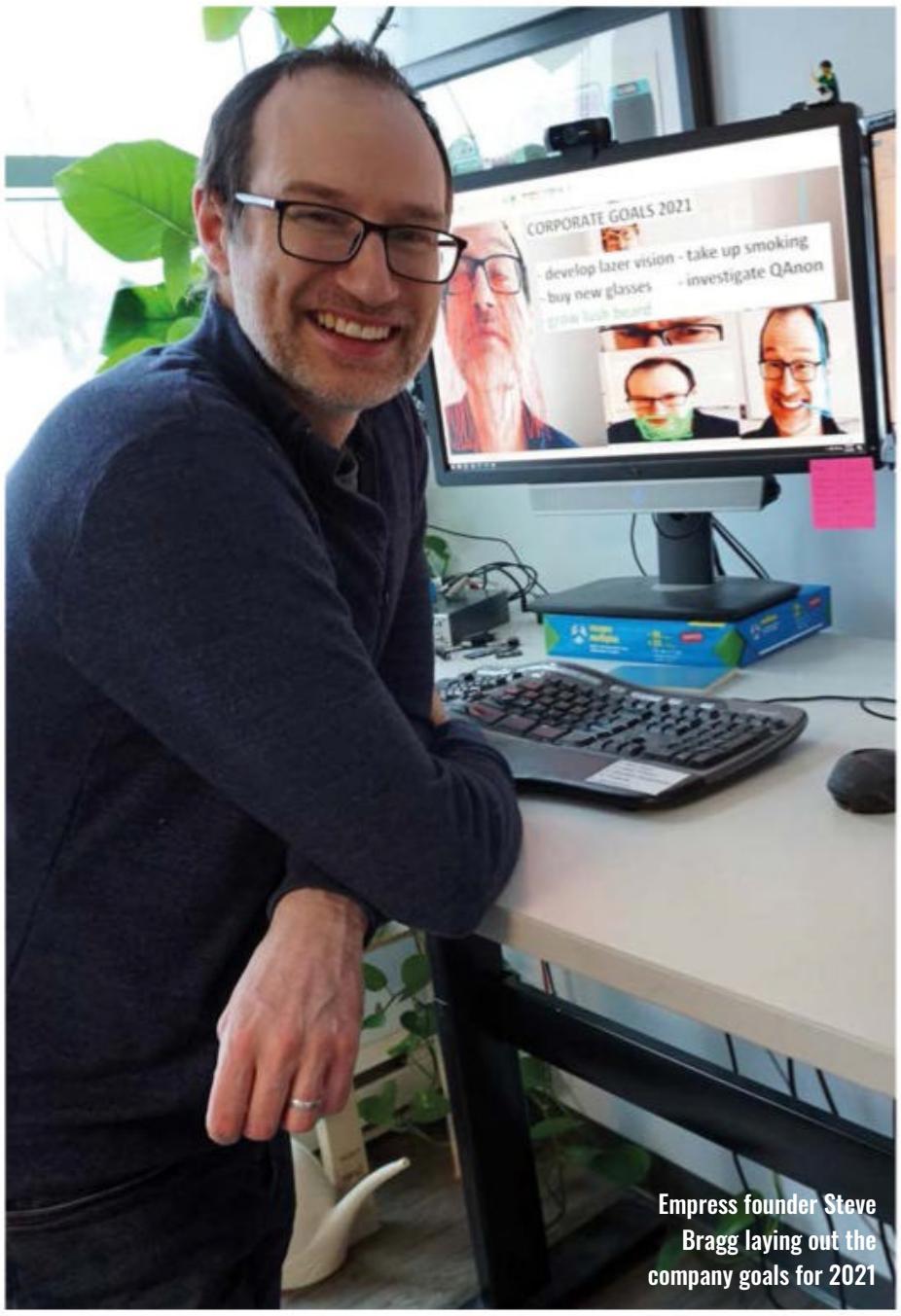
"Probably after the success of the Superdelay pedal, which took about two years to develop and has now been replaced by the Echosystem. The company wasn't viable before the Superdelay and we were still in debt throughout its development. I wasn't even sure it was going to happen. It went on to be our best-selling pedal. At the time, there weren't really any other big multi-mode delay pedals on the market and the reverse mode is something people still ask for. I still see a lot of Superdelays on people's boards even though it has been discontinued for years now!"

Did you have any external investment starting out?

"After I finished university, my parents let me move back in with them so that I could keep costs low while starting the business. At one point, there were three of us working out of my bedroom and another person downstairs building pedals. So while my parents aren't exactly investors, they definitely helped out! Here in Canada, there are a couple schemes that helped us out, especially early on. First, there was IRAP (Industrial Research Assistance Program), which is a very hands-on grant. Every month you've got to submit a report of your progress, which is a little strange. But hey, you are literally being given other people's money so at least there's a bit of accountability. The other one is SRED (Scientific Research & Experimental Development), which is a tax credit for certain R&D work done."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"I got the idea for boring pedal names from Zachary Vex at the DIYstompboxes forum.



Empress founder Steve Bragg laying out the company goals for 2021

Dean Morris delicately assembling the ZOIA 'everything pedal'

Someone was asking for a crazy name for their new pedal and he chimed in and said, 'Just go with something simple, like tremolo'. There are some pedals today that I look at and don't have any idea what it is they do. I guess the ZOIA would be an exception to this for us too. We could have named it 'multi-effects', 'modular', 'sandbox' or 'everything pedal'. I still have a hard time getting across the potential of the ZOIA to people that haven't heard of it."

Bailey Soares working on another Empress ZOIA unit

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"I was frequently using pure data with a Monome grid controller. I love the interface of the Monome but since I'm in front of the computer all day for work, I thought it would be nice to have a similar UI without being chained to a computer. That's how the ZOIA was initially conceived."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"When I sent the press release for the Empress Tremolo, maybe back in 2006 or 2007, to Harmony Central, I figured I'd get a couple of preorders. By the end of the day, there were 50. I think I cried a little."

What are the biggest opportunities for the guitar industry in 2021?

"I think we're all still trying to understand what the changing market is going to look like in the future and adapting quickly to these unknowns is the biggest challenge and opportunity for the industry over the coming years. We have gone from having a skeleton crew at the shop to everyone going back to the office wearing masks to only having one person at the shop at a time. For our production, we actually ended up rejigging our entire manufacturing process from batch manufacturing – with multiple people doing different tasks to build the pedals – to production cells where only one person builds a pedal from start to finish. Now we have people building pedals from their home. But we do feel fortunate that we can keep production going. It's crazy. Demand for music gear is up but the challenges for building in-house have also increased."

What's next for Empress?

"We have some really big plans for the future but, with the long delays between announcements and releases on some of our previous products, we're probably known for announcing pedals too early! I'm going to keep quiet on new product launches for now. We do have some new firmware updates for the ZOIA in the works, which are pretty exciting."

Visit empresseffects.com for more

SHOP TALK

FROGGY BOTTOM GUITARS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER
PHOTOGRAPHY FROGGY BOTTOM GUITARS

Nestled amid the beautiful Green Mountains of Vermont, Froggy Bottom Guitars crafts fine acoustic instruments using centuries-old woodworking techniques

There's no shortage of manufacturers working in the realm of guitars and related equipment that purport to produce 'custom-made' goods, to work 'by hand', and to craft their wares the way it was done back in the good old days. Take a tour of Froggy Bottom's Green Mountains workshop, however, and speak to founder Michael Millard and his partner luthiers Eric Goodenoughand Andy Mueller, and you'll almost certainly come away with a feel for what such terms should properly encompass.

"Most of what's referred to as 'hand-made' in the world of guitars stretches the meaning of the phrase," says Millard. "I mean, come on, guys, you know? You can say it all you want but it doesn't make it true."

So, what does this down-to-earth, next-level 'hand-made' ethos entail? Step this way for a whiff of the wood chips.

ABOVE Froggy Bottom's output ranges from the utilitarian to the heavily figured

OPPOSITE Froggy Bottom founder Michael Millard against Vermont's lush backdrop

FROGGY MOUNTAIN HIGH

This past October marked the 50th anniversary of Michael Millard's entry into professional guitar making. While he built his first Froggy Bottom guitar in his apartment on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, bending its hardwood sides on a homemade heat pipe fired by a gas flame, the maker has long been associated with the rural New England state of Vermont, which in fact was always Millard's home, in the truest sense.

"I lived in Vermont as a boy," says Millard. "When I was 10, my dad took a position at Yale University teaching architectural design in the School of Art and Architecture, and I was effectively dragged kicking and screaming to Connecticut because of that change in his work. I was placated by the promise that we would get a small wooden sailboat – arguably my favourite form of self-entertainment in those days was sanding and finishing wood."

More than the act of sailing itself, it was working on the wood – and the company that he kept while doing so – that introduced the young Millard to his calling. Hanging out and working in the boatyard at the edge of the university, which fed onto Long Island Sound, the youngster would encounter a surprisingly helpful crowd of old salts, which he says "led to work in that yard, and being under the tutelage of a couple of truly old-world craftsmen". It was a fortunate break, and it wouldn't be the first time Millard guided by a seasoned hand or two.

"One was in his latter 70s," says Millard, "and one, I think, was 81. They took me under their wing and taught me about woodworking and building and repairing wooden boats. I've always been, it seems, blessed that at every point in my life when I was at a crossroads in some way, someone showed up who was appreciative of me and my desire to learn about this stuff, and offered me guidance and opportunities."

Hinted at here is the guidance of acclaimed guitar maker Michael Gurian, the next master craftsman to take Millard under his wing when he hired the young

“WE DON’T HAVE TO BUILD A MOULD OR RETOOL ANYTHING, WHICH MEANS WE GET TO TRY A LOT OF THINGS. WE MAKE A RIDICULOUS NUMBER OF MODELS FOR A COMPANY OUR SIZE”

ABOVE Partner luthier Eric Goodenough built his first complete Froggy Bottom guitar in 1982

OPPOSITE Froggy Bottom instruments are built face-down on a building board with no jigs or forms or other repeatable templates

woodworker to assist him in expanding the output of his Manhattan guitar workshop in 1970. For a time, Millard worked side by side at Gurian with another aspiring luthier, Thomas Humphrey, who has since become a world-renowned maker of classical guitars.

“A month after I went to work for him, I was offered a job as his shop foreman,” says Millard. “I’m not sure I was well prepared for guiding other people in terms of operating a shop very well but I was a pretty skilled woodworker at that time. It worked out very joyfully for me, and that was a launching pad for work in guitars.”

FREE-FORM METHODOLOGY

Part of what clicked between Millard and Gurian was the senior luthier’s free-form building technique. Gurian Guitars had recently shifted from building classical guitars to offering a range of steel-string instruments. But the company continued to produce these according to the same classical methodology, a technique that perfectly suited Millard’s attitude towards woodworking.

“He built steel-string guitars when I met him, in sort of a classical methodology,” says Millard. “And we built with a free-standing model of classical methodology, which puts the braced top face-down on a building stand or a board, and then the sides are added and the back goes on last. And this is the direct opposite of the construction methodology that most steel-string companies, who are actually manufacturers, follow. And that’s a critical element in terms of how our guitars function: building them face-down on a building board rather than the top going on last.”

Allowing for some refinements over the years since his long-ago move back to Vermont, this is the approach that Millard and his Froggy Bottom colleagues have retained to this day. They build their guitars free-form, top-down, with no jigs or forms or other repeatable templates. Suffice to say, it’s a lot of additional work, even compared to the otherwise hand-made techniques that employ these aids. And the benefits?

“Well, you’re talking about taste,” says Millard. “When they say it’s better to do it in the fashion of the top going on last, I say, ‘Okay, why?’ I would become sort of a forensic pathologist in terms of examining their work and saying, ‘Okay, what’s the benefit of this?’ And the real benefit is in terms of appearance. It’s cosmetics.

“When you put the top on last and you look inside the guitar, the builders have been able to clean up the interior of the guitar that you are able to observe through the soundhole, so it looks nice and clean. I prefer to approach it from a question of function: when you put the back on last and you look through the soundhole, you may actually see a tiny bit of glue here and there that you would not see following the other methodology.

“However, we can build a guitar [when we build it face-down] because it compresses the top somewhat and then, when you take the strapping off the assembly, it rebounds – there’s a curvature to the top that’s possible, that allows a lighter build should you wish to achieve that, and a greater degree of strength via the structural integrity of the top that has some curvature to it.

“And so, we always look at the justification for a methodology based upon function, rather than upon appearance, okay? Cosmetics are important and everyone should do clean work. But justifying a fundamental choice in terms of methodology of construction based on ‘it looks a little bit nicer’ rather than ‘it works better’, for me, is BS.”

Eric Goodenough built his first complete Froggy Bottom guitar in 1982, then enjoyed a

15-year career in wildlife management and conservation before eventually returning to the fold in 2005. Given his broad yet oddly convergent career paths, he also finds added virtue in the company's chosen building approach.

"To me," says Goodenough, "being responsive to the materials results in a guitar that is itself responsive. Some might find our methods archaic, even simplistic. While we do 'tool-up' on occasion, we do so only in service of a better outcome, without sacrificing our need to be responsive and attentive to the materials or task.

"The free-form process requires us to work in this way. It also allows us to have so much variation in service of meeting the player's functional needs.

"I want the distance between my tool and my heart to be as short as possible. Jigging up everything, just because I can, takes me further away."

WHEN CUSTOM TRULY IS

For partner Andy Mueller, who also expresses an appreciation for the sort of symbiotic relationship between the guitars and the place in which they are created, Froggy Bottom's approach to guitar-building is so thoroughly infused in the results that it's difficult to untangle the roots – though thankfully he's willing to give it a go.

"The methodology we use has consequences," he says, "which are too numerous to count really. There are three that stand out to me though. The first is that we are free to try new things. When we want to build a guitar of a design that we've never built before, all we have to do is draw the shape and specify the scale length and other design parameters. We don't have to build a mould or retool anything, which means we get to try a lot of things. We make a ridiculous number of models of guitars for a company our size – of any size really.

“THE WORK WE DO HAS ALWAYS BEEN MORE ABOUT WHAT WE WANT OUR LIVES TO BE LIKE, RATHER THAN WHAT WE WANT OUR BUSINESS TO ACCOMPLISH”

“We also have the ability to respond to the materials we use in a very personal way. It’s wood, not plastic or aluminium. It has personality and we value that. Two guitars of a given model, built in the same year, the same month, even the same week, might have significant differences in brace proportions, placement, back arch, body depth, side thickness… and that ability to respond personally to the nature of a set of wood is necessary to building the best guitar possible, which is what we aim for.”

Mueller adds: “I have to believe that all of that freedom, to explore design ideas, to pay attention to the wood, ultimately serves our ability to connect a player with the specifications of the guitar they’re seeking, and then to build that guitar as envisioned.”

For Millard, his partners’ discussions of the Froggy Bottom methodology further defines what a ‘custom guitar’ really is. Which is to say, there’s ‘custom’ and there’s custom – and when every guitar you make is essentially a one-off, intended to best serve the needs and desires of the customer who commissions it, the entire effort leans heavily towards the latter.

“Our entire methodology is created around the concept of flexibility,” says Millard. “There’s a lot of tossing around of the term ‘custom’ in the world of steel-string guitars. For the most part, what that means is: ‘We have a recipe and we make the same cake every time. What we’re changing is the frosting and the jimmies [sprinkles].’ It doesn’t have anything to do with function. Here, we dwell on function.

“We are capable, quite literally, of changing each and every component of any guitar we make in order to have that guitar higher-functioning in terms of how it serves its player as a tool. That’s what a guitar is: it’s a tool. For some people, it doesn’t matter much the nature of the tool, it’s just sort of a, ‘Hey, look at me. Aren’t I cool?’ thing. And that’s great. If you just want to look at the frosting and the jimmies of the cake, buy one of their guitars. But if you’re looking for something wherein it’s a highly refined tool that’s going to serve your needs in terms of self-expression, then we think we offer a hugely viable alternative to what most other people do in their pursuit of quote-unquote ‘custom guitars’.”

In addition to the luthiers with whom we’re speaking, the Froggy Bottom team includes the full- and part-time assistance of Chris Bavaria on finishing; Mark Burds-Masera on woodworking; Scott Ainslie, Barb Ackemann and Meg McCarthy on web editing, design and assistance; and Glenn Carson on the often elaborate inlay work, as well as the abalone ‘froggy profile’ logo, originally designed by Millard’s father, which is inlaid on every headstock.

It goes without saying that the maker’s approach and limited personnel puts restrictions on the number of guitars it can make, which totals about 80 to 90 a year. Even so, Millard and co resolutely refute the pay-and-wait formula that many small-shop makers employ these days, which can lead to a years-long vigil as your place in the queue creeps along.

"We don't play that game," says Millard, with a congenial laugh. "We don't take an order for a guitar that we cannot build within one year. That's what we've always done. I've never subscribed to waiting lists. It seems egotistical and unfair to both parties for me to say, 'Oh, I can't build you a guitar for 10 years but here's the price I'm going to charge you for it'. Come on, that's absurd! It just does not hold water. And, you know, what happens if a meteor falls out of the sky and hits me on the nose next week and I've just taken a $20,000 deposit on a supposedly $40,000 guitar from you? It's like, oh boy, everything is a mess!"

GREEN MOUNTAIN STATE OF MIND

For many of its residents, Vermont is as much a state of mind as it is a place on the map. Its name was derived from French explorers' observations of the *vert mont* they encountered in the territory – some 170 miles inland from the Atlantic coast and bordering Canada to the north – which has since become known for a largely rural population that often expresses a deep appreciation for the environment, and for the outdoor life in general. It's telling, and fitting, that more than one member of the Froggy Bottom team's bios describe their form of habitation as 'off the grid'.

Time and again, throughout our conversations, it becomes apparent that there's something in the way of life in this green slice of the northeastern corner of the USA that is inseparable from the way this small shop makes its guitars.

Combine his degree in physics and passion for music with a heartfelt love of the environs surrounding Froggy Bottom's home in Chelsea, Vermont (population 381), and Mueller, for one, finds it all coming together rather naturally.

"There are so many aspects of this work," he says, "building instruments in the way that we do, that are perfectly calibrated to bring me joy. That's the self-centred view. The connection to my lifelong passion for music, the opportunity for constantly deepening understanding of the way instruments work, the opportunity to live in a beautiful place and spend time every day communing with nature, not to mention the awesome people I get to work with… that's a pretty good list."

Likewise, Goodenough finds that his work with guitars is informed by his surroundings. "Especially the natural ones," he says. "Our part of the world has far more dirt roads than paved. We watch the seasons come and go with an eye on the weather, especially the humidity. But the calming effect of a walk in the woods or the peacefulness of a sunrise or snowfall is part of the 'presence' that I feel is required to be attentive and responsive to the materials, and to execute the work as well I know how. Being truly present for the work is paramount, and contributes to the feeling that I've put myself into this guitar – for the player."

Millard concurs. "The work we do has always been more about what we want our lives to be like, rather than what we want our business to accomplish," he says. "What's the horse and what's the cart has always been very clear to us. And it's not just me. We all love living where we live. It's a place where people still listen to each other, even argue with each other in order to learn something rather than to be right and have the other person be wrong."

Ultimately, it's this attitude – that enviable interconnectivity between place and occupation, as well as the personal nature of the builder-client relationship – that ensures that the Froggy Bottom experience is as much one of person-to-person as it is of builder to wood, to musician. It's the people that matter.

"My joy is always in meeting each player and saying, 'What would be the perfect guitar for that individual?'" says Millard. "That's always been a joy for me and that in turn passes along to working with individuals who want a guitar from us or think they might want a guitar from us. Regardless of their wants and needs in a guitar or their skill or musical style as a player, those are the people who have given me the opportunity to do what I do. So, those are things that I really, really love to this day. And they reflect back upon the fact that we treat every single guitar and every client as an individual. Everything starts over again. It's a new job every time someone knocks on the door or the telephone rings."

Visit froggybottomguitars.com for more

ABOVE With the back braces carved and sanded, it's almost ready to be fitted to the sides

OPPOSITE Feathering brace ends so that they better fit the kerfed body lining

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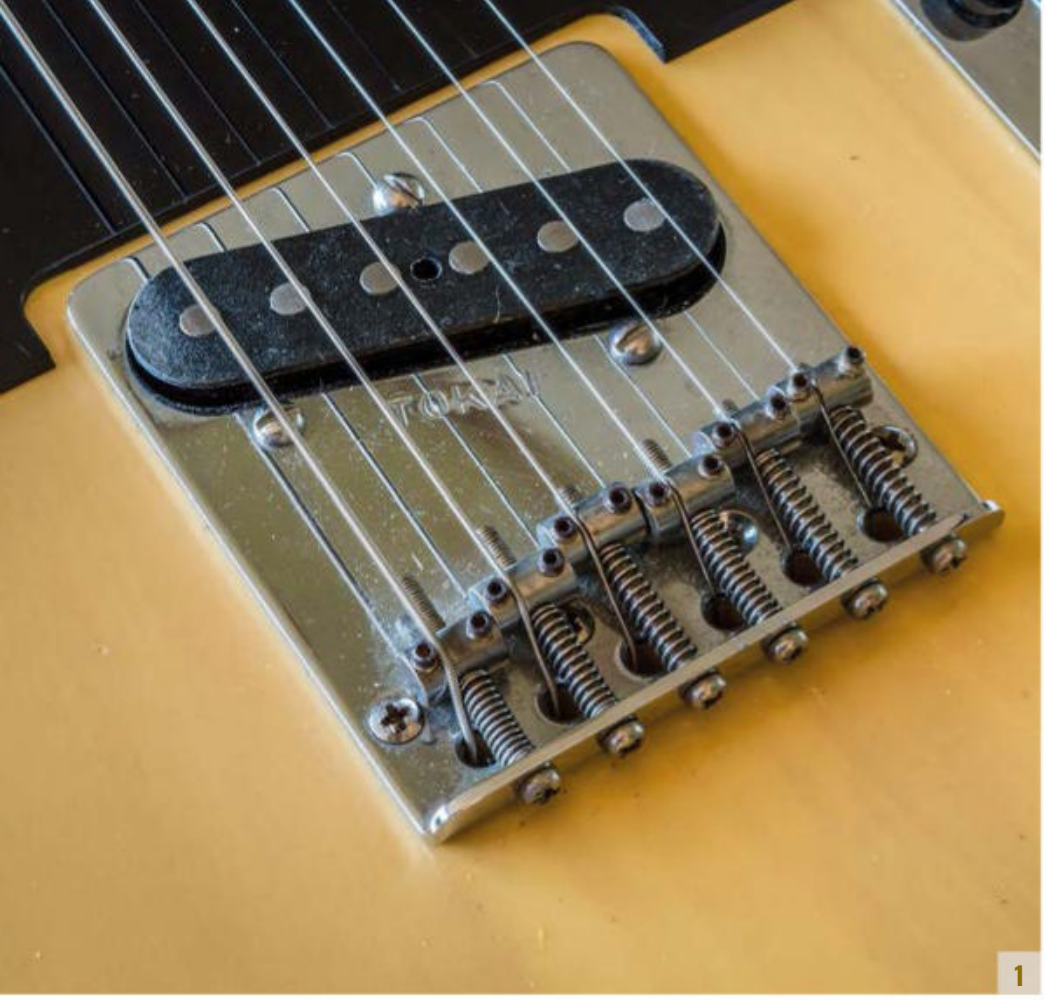
DIY WORKSHOP

T-STYLE BRIDGE UPGRADE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

It's no American classic but this 1984 Tokai Breezysound is a couple of upgrades away from looking and sounding the part. Here, we show you how to swap the bridge and sort out the controls

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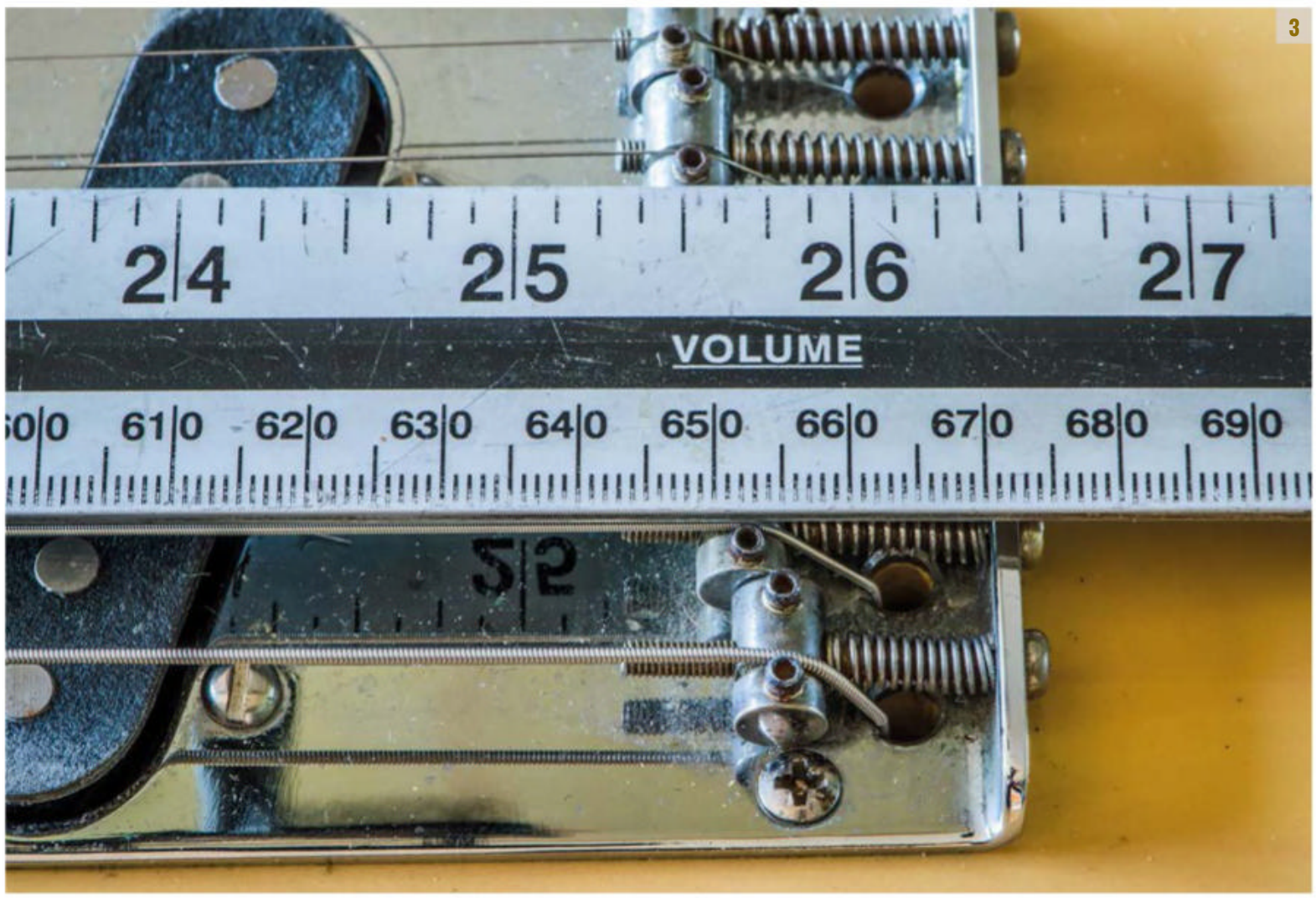
1 This Tokai Breezysound's original bridge is fine but we're searching for a more traditional look and tone

2 Gotoh's In-Tune bridge updates the 1950s formula with cutaway sides and compensated brass saddles

3 Taking intonation measurements before removing the original bridge will make it easier to set up the replacement unit



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By the early 1980s, Japan's top guitar manufacturers were doing a fine job of replicating vintage US instruments of the golden era. This T-style Tokai Breezysound is a case in point – if you can ignore its six-saddle bridge. The owner can't, so we're switching it with a Gotoh In-Tune bridge with three compensated brass saddles.

First I need to establish that everything is working. I don't want to mount a relatively expensive aftermarket part on a guitar unless it's going to play properly. Fortunately, things are in good shape, and I check the intonation so I can measure the distances between the nut and each of the saddles.

There are two reasons for doing this: I want to ensure that the new bridge saddles can be set to the same position when the bridge screw and string holes are lined up; and having a fairly accurate gauge of the approximate saddle positions will give me a head start when I'm setting the guitar up after the bridge installation.

I remove the strings and the three screws securing the bridge (there should be four screws but one seems to be missing). Upon lifting the bridge, I make a pleasing discovery: a set of Fender Custom Shop pickups were installed by a previous owner.

According to the Tokai's current custodian, guitarist Will Havard (willhavard.com), these impressive pickups weren't mentioned when this guitar was listed for sale secondhand. As a result, our planned pickup upgrade might not be necessary after all. The bridge can be replaced without extracting the bridge pickup, so I remove the three screws, allow it to drop into the cavity and then lift off the bridge.

ON THE HOLE

One reason for choosing a Gotoh bridge is that Japanese guitars and hardware tend to be made to metric rather than imperial measurements. USA-spec parts often don't fit old Japanese guitars, so you should be careful if you're shopping for repro parts in search of a more vintage look.

With this Gotoh bridge, there's good and bad news. The good? The spacing between its string and screw holes is pretty much identical to the Tokai bridge. The bad? Only two of the screw holes line up exactly, with the outer holes being a few millimetres out. I could bodge it and have those two screws go in at a slight angle, but I'd prefer not to do that. Instead, I'm going to plug the holes and re-drill them so that the screws can go in straight.

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4 Three of the four original screw holes have been drilled out to 4mm so dowels will be glued in

5 A flushcut saw will tidy up the dowel ends but you could use a sharp chisel too

6 The new bridge has been fitted but it's a little too shiny for this old Tokai

PLUG UGLY

The existing screw holes are 3mm in diameter, so I'm drilling them out to 4mm. Ideally I'd use a press drill for this but mine doesn't have enough clearance for the drill bit to reach the centre of the guitar's body. Thankfully, it's okay to hand-drill these holes, because the existing holes will guide the bit.

Before drilling, I insert a smaller drill bit into the holes so that I can gauge their depth. This tells me that I need to mark my 4mm bit for a 30mm depth. I drill both outer holes cleanly, keeping the drill speed low to avoid damaging the finish.

It doesn't all go so smoothly. When I try drilling the hole where that missing fourth screw should be, the bit veers off at an angle and I make an unwelcome discovery: half of the screw is still deep inside the hole.

I use some 4mm birch dowel for the plugs. After cutting them to length, I use a small paintbrush to get Titebond Original glue into the holes, wipe a little more glue onto the dowels themselves, and then tap them in.

After an hour, I use a flushcut saw to remove the excess dowel, then tidy up with a chisel. I roughly position the bridge, carefully aligning it with the pickguard and temporarily securing it using the one original screw hole. I then mark the centre of each bridge screw hole onto the plugs.

I make new pilot holes using an electric drill mounted in a drill guide. Drill guides are readily available accessories that allow regular electric drills to be used like a drill press for perfectly perpendicular holes.

Next, I mount the new bridge onto the body to check its alignment. Excluding major invasive surgery, there's nothing I can do about the snapped bridge screw lodged deep inside its hole. Rather than attempting to extract it, I get the new screw about halfway in and then gently tap it upright with a small hammer to lever the broken screw to one side. The final position of the new screw is at a slight angle but I've seen worse and it will do the job.

AGE RELATED

The client's brief is to age the new bridge parts so that they blend in with the Tokai's original hardware. The saddles are brass but all the other parts are nickel-plated, which means they require different processes.

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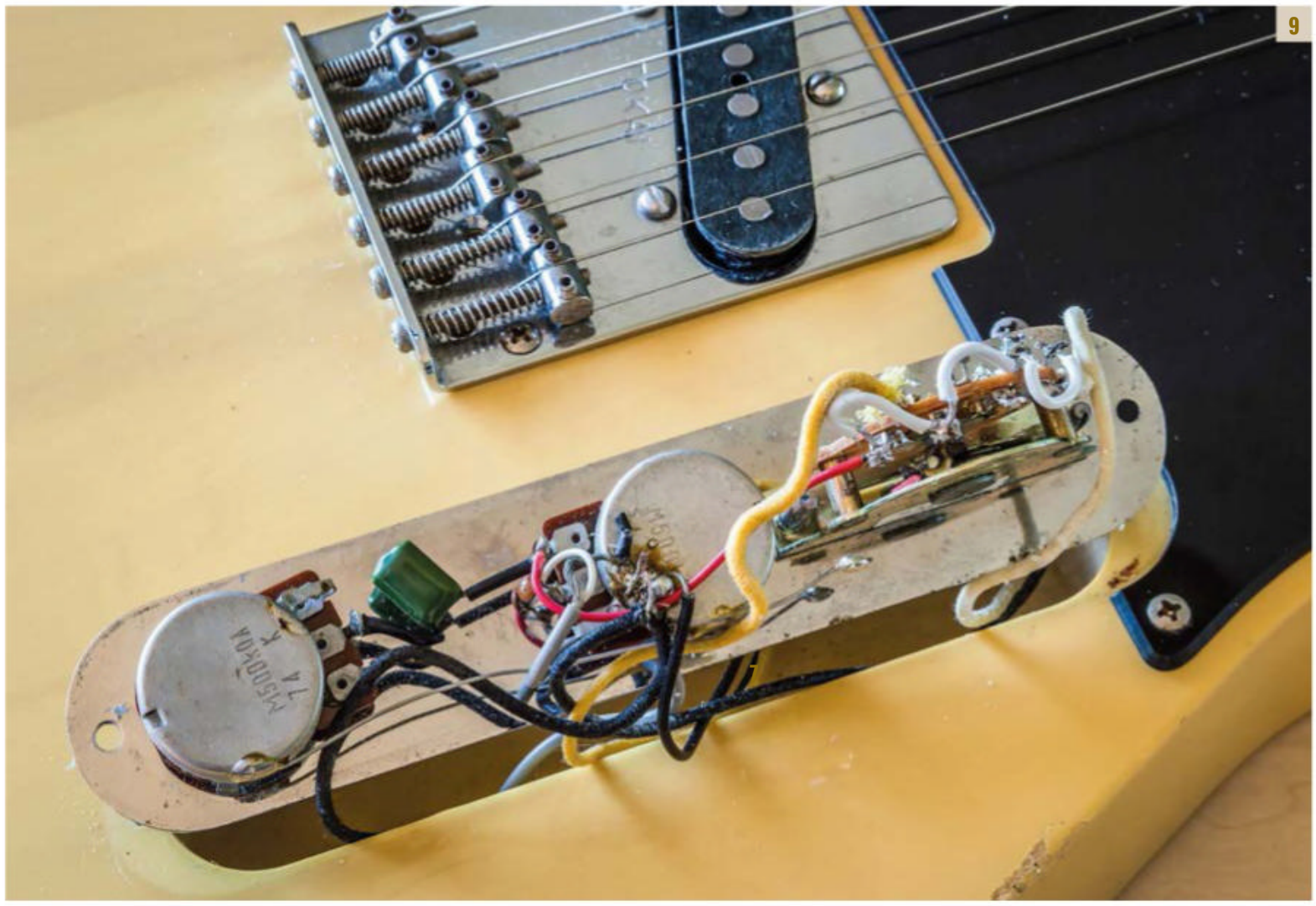
7 Ferric chloride ages the nickel plating while ammonia fumes are used to darken the brass saddles

8 The Gotoh bridge looks much better with aged parts and with its outer saddle screws shortened, it feels smooth under the hand too

9 The stock potentiometers measure 500k and the switch wiring could be neater

10 With a new pair of 250k CTS pots, a paper-in-oil tone capacitor and a newly rewired switch, this old Tokai sounds better than ever



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For the brass, I pour about 10mm of ammonia into a plastic container, place the saddles into a small glass vessel and then place that in the ammonia. I fix the lid onto the container and allow the saddles to sit in the ammonia fumes until I'm happy with their colour. It takes about three hours. Be sure to wear a mask and goggles if you're dealing with ammonia at home.

Donning latex gloves, I degrease the bridge using isopropyl alcohol and place it into PCB etchant solution (ferric chloride) diluted 50/50 with water. I leave the bridge in for about five seconds and then rinse it in water. I do the same with all the screws and springs. The object here is merely to knock off the shiny newness rather than make the hardware look 70 years old.

FINISHING UP

To mount the bridge pickup, I opt for vintage-style surgical tubing in favour of the original springs, and I use my earlier measurements to position the saddles so the intonation needs little adjustment once the action is set. I also replace the factory 500k potentiometers with CTS 250k pots and install a paper-in-oil tone capacitor.

The Tokai not only looks better but it certainly sounds better too, so our project is complete. I can highly recommend this Gotoh bridge, and the replacement process described here can be applied to any T-style electric guitar that needs more of a vintage vibe. These early Tokai Breezysounds really are a bit of a steal. G

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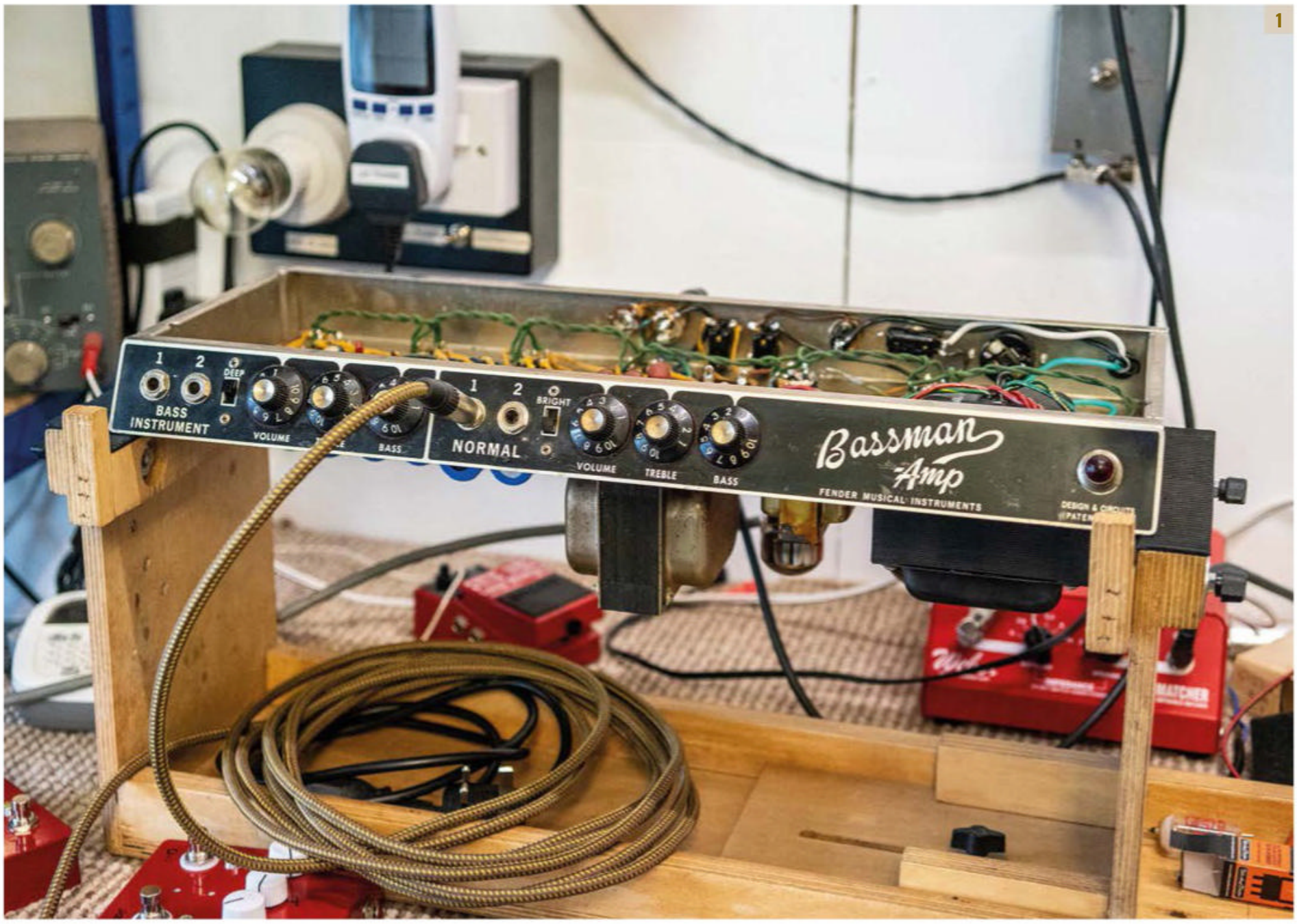
AMPLIFIER FAQ

Rift's Chris Fantana returns to the vintage Fender Bassman he worked on last month and gets ready to fire it up

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com



With this 1966 Bassman now on the bench and in a much safer condition than when I first found it, I'm happy to apply mains voltage and see how it sounds. I've talked about using a current-limiting device previously and this is the perfect time to do so. We refer to this procedure as a soft start and this allows the amplifier to turn on slowly with a critical safety net in place should there be a problem. This particular Bassman is a USA model, so a step-down transformer is required to drop 240-volt mains to the 117 volts that it requires.

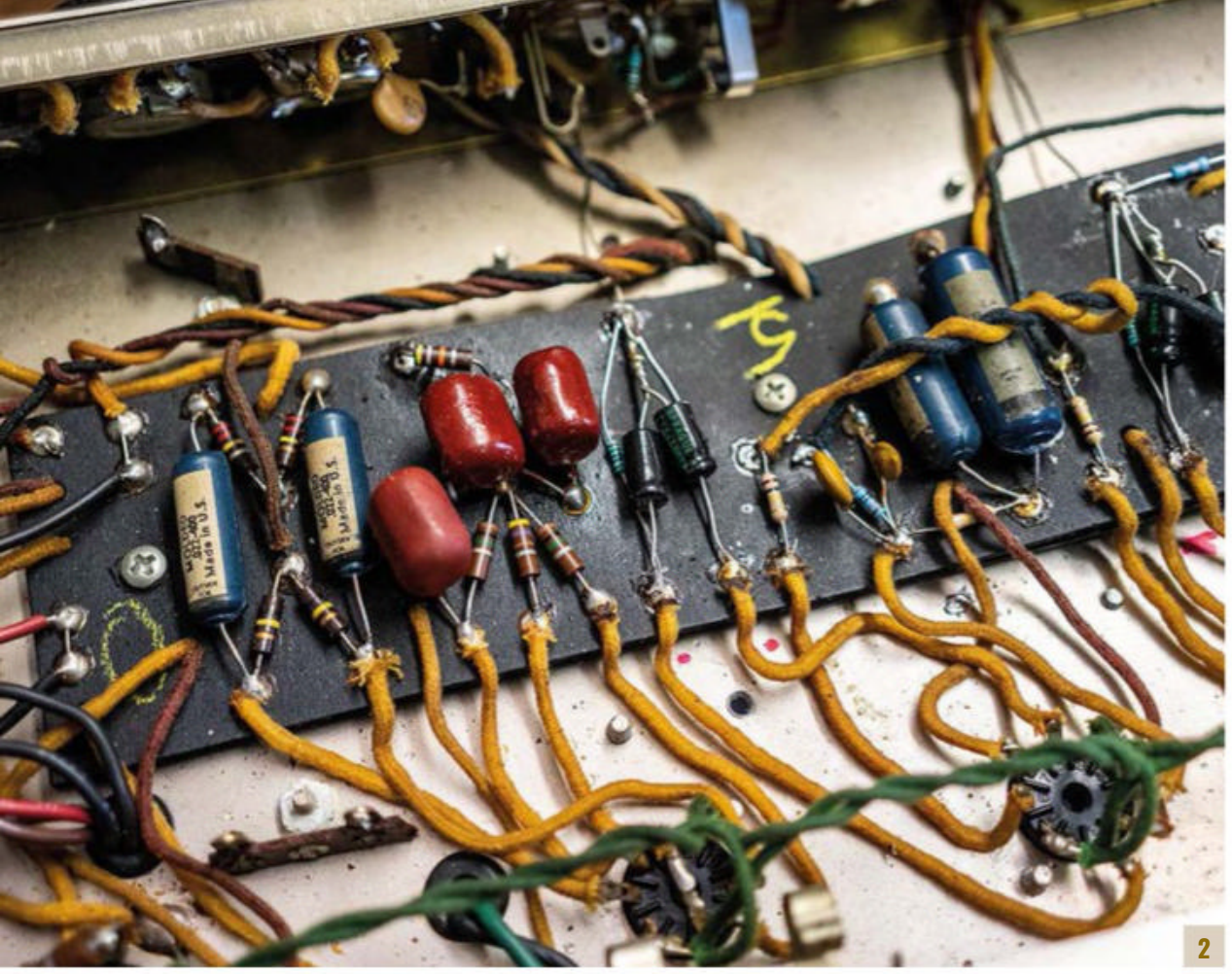
With the amplifier plugged into the step-down transformer, then into the current-limiting device, I apply mains voltage and watch the light bulb carefully to see if it indicates anything untoward. Fortunately, there's no such issue and after a few voltage checks throughout the chassis, I'm happy to continue.

Firstly, I drive the amplifier with a signal generator and, using an oscilloscope, I can view the output signal. I immediately see noise, crackles and other artefacts that indicate something isn't performing as it should. The bass channel is the better of the two but that still exhibits issues I'd like to rectify. I take the opportunity to measure the output power of the amplifier, as this will give me a good indication of any major issues.

With the amp turned up to just below the point of clipping, I use Ohm's law (power in watts = (voltage x voltage) / resistance) to calculate the output power across the four-ohm dummy load that it's connected to. I measure 12 volts AC across the load, giving us an output of about 36 watts. Not great, not terrible. For reference, this amp should be doing 50 watts with relative ease. Time for some investigation, then.

WATTS GOING ON

Just like the filter capacitor board, the central one has had its fair share of shoddy repair work that will need to be sorted out before it goes out of the door.



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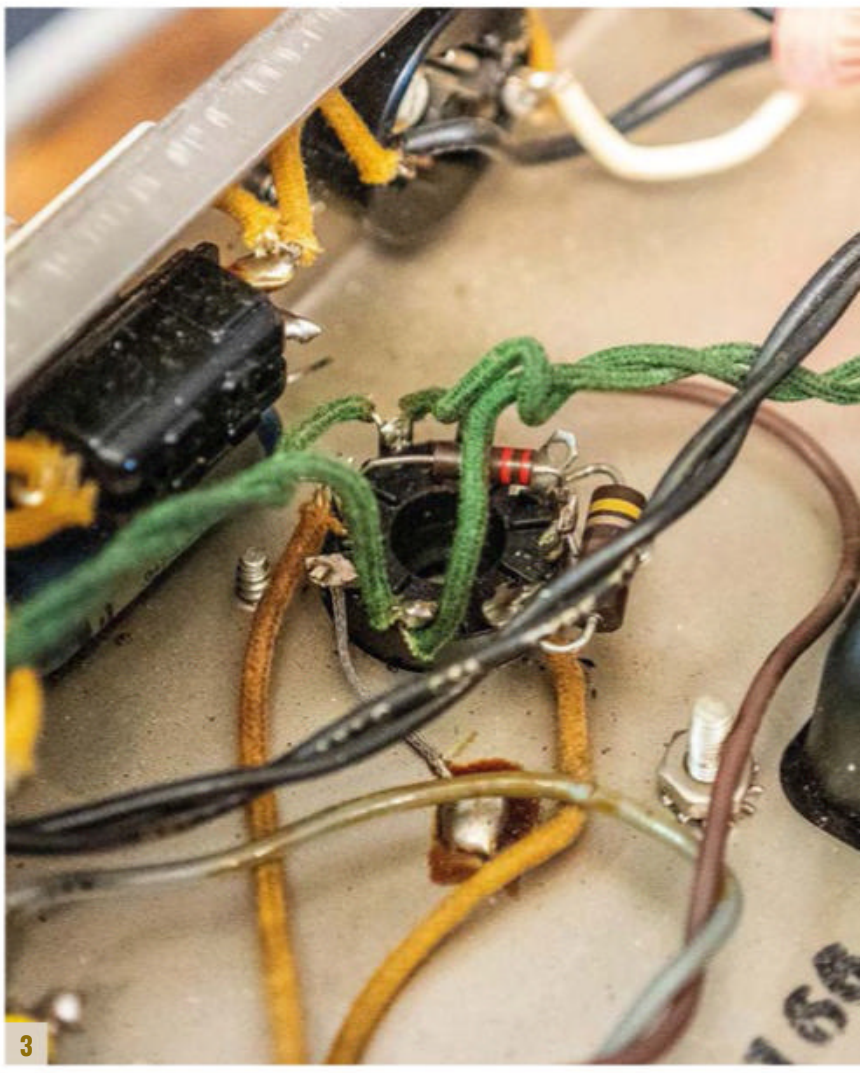

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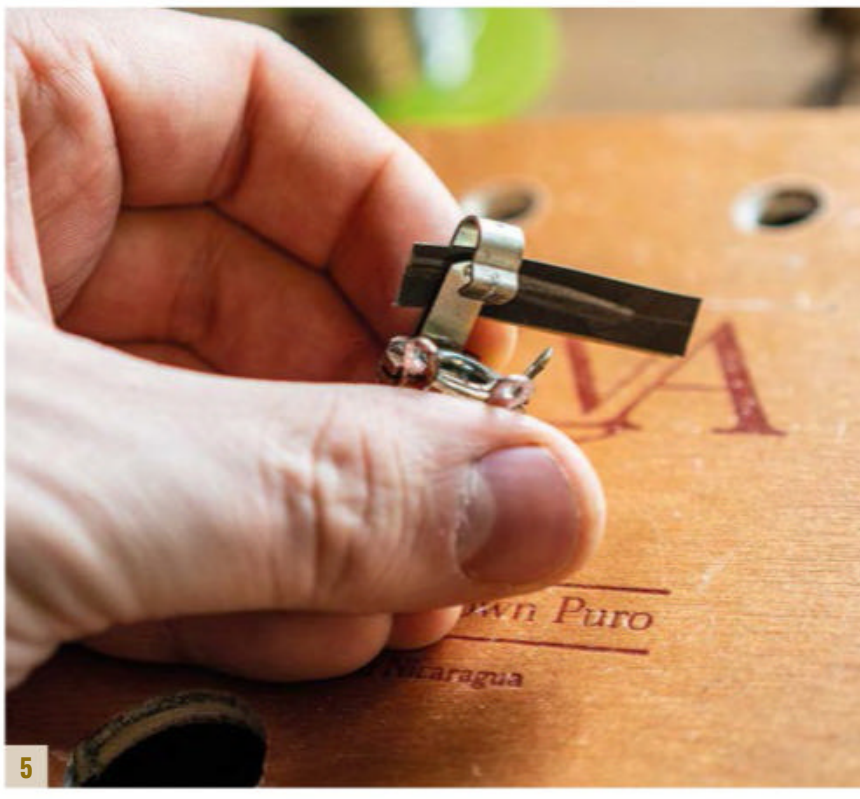

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Not just because it might be causing problems but because my name is now on this amplifier – and my reputation with it! Starting with a copy of the original schematic, I compare the values of each resistor and capacitor, noting whether any are different from the published values. As expected, I find that the previous amp tech has confused their resistor colour bands and installed the wrong values by a multiplier. For example, a 1.5k cathode resistor in the normal channel has been replaced with a 15k, and a 100k anode resistor has become a 10k. This isn't a tone mod by any stretch of the imagination, just a mistake.

I decide that my best course of action now is to simply work my way down the board and rectify any issues that are found. It's also a good time to measure any components that typically have a hard life and swap them if they're out of tolerance. With the board back to spec, I can move onto the valve sockets, potentiometers, switches and inputs.

When it comes to servicing the front control panel components, I often find it quicker and more thorough to remove them from the chassis and work on them separately. I do that here, mounting the components to an old cigar box drilled with the correct hole spacing. Now I can see the condition of the parts and the solder joints usually hidden by the chassis lip. Cleaning the inputs sockets is easy with a small piece of 2,000-grit sandpaper. The pots are cleaned with Servisol spray, then everything is reinstalled back into the chassis.

Firing up the Bassman again reveals a drastic improvement to noise, tone, volume and output power, with it now producing 50 watts clean and more than 80 watts at full crank. A quick tweak of the bias and a two-hour soak test concludes the project. I can confirm that the customer's complaints are sorted. This Bassman is back to its best. G

Visit riftamps.com for more on Rift's handwired amplifiers

1 Securely mounted on the bench, we can now fire up the Bassman

2 The main component board is marred by poor repair work

3 These resistors are out of tolerance and in need of replacement

4 Cigar boxes make an excellent repair jig for pots and sockets

5 Small strips of sandpaper are ideal for cleaning up socket contacts

1

2

3

1 What am I up to here? Here's a hint: it was something that made me feel like I was losing my marbles

2 Shoutout to Creston Lea for making such great guitars and to Mastery for making excellent hardware

3 I touched those probes on everything I could think of that was connected to the string path. Nothin'

TECH TALK

HOW TO FIX GROUNDING ISSUES WITH ANODISED HARDWARE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

The force is strong with this baritone but it needs a little surgery to kill the buzz

Betcha can't guess what I'm doing here. Probes on the bridge? What's that all about? If you haven't figured it out by now, fear not, I will explain. But first: a little background.

This is my Darth Vader-inspired baritone Jazzmaster-style instrument built by guitar artisan and longtime friend Creston Lea. I looked far and wide for a baritone that met all of my needs and found all comers lacking. Creston took my list of requirements and wholly exceeded them all, including a 26.75-inch scale, a 1 5/8-inch nut width on a mahogany neck, Lollar Jazzmaster and Thunderbird pickups, and vintage-correct vibrato placement.

Creston also graciously allowed me the nerdy indulgence of the *Star Wars* theme, with the guitar essentially built around my custom black Mastery Death Star bridge and vibrato, a black-over-Desert Sand finish that evokes the journey of Anakin from pod-racer to powerful Sith Lord, and light-up pickup selector buttons that echo the look of Vader's chest panel.

Owning it has been a total delight and I couldn't be happier with the sound, the feel and the performance of this guitar. Creston has been one of my favourite builders for about a decade now, and it blows my mind that I have some of his work in my collection.

At some point during the last string change, I noticed something that I hadn't before: all of a sudden, the instrument seemed noisier than I remembered.

4

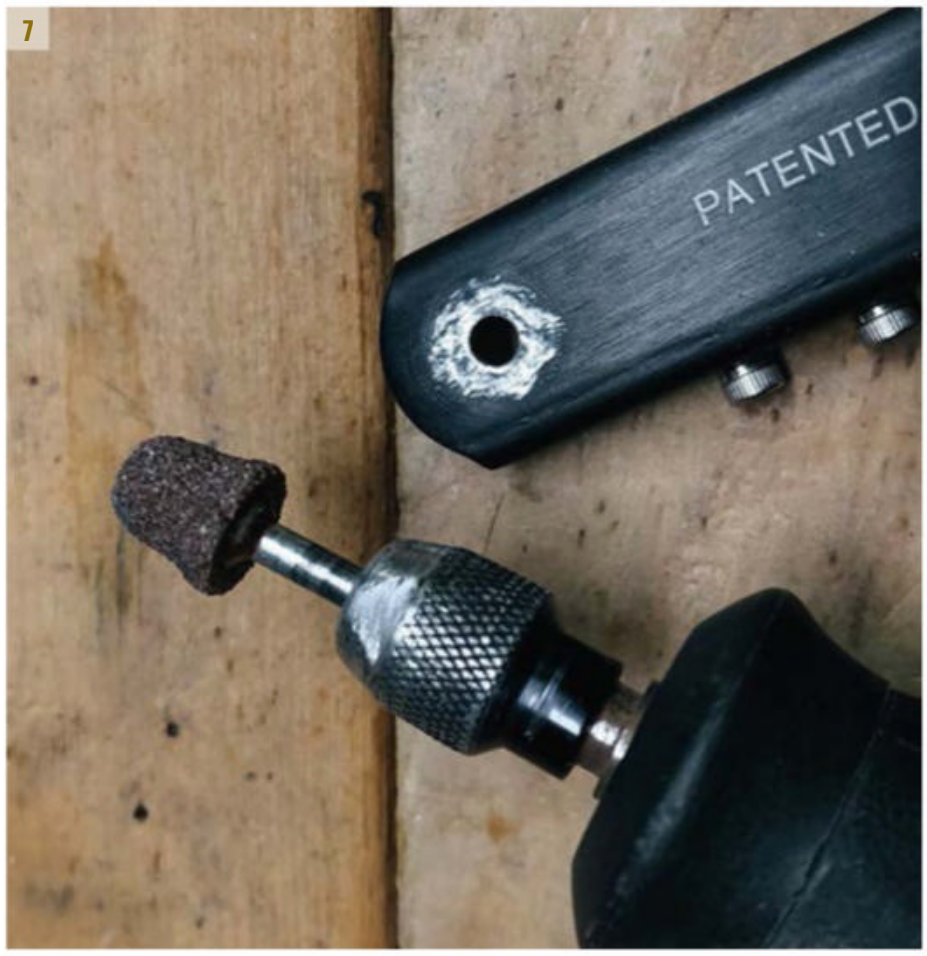
5

4 A thin Fender aluminium shield next to a Fender gold-anodised guard. You can see the areas where I've sanded off the gold layer to expose the bare metal underneath for a proper ground connection between my electronic components

5 & 6 This was probably more work than necessary but, like my pappy always said, 'If it ain't worth overdoing, it ain't worth doing.' Miss you, gramps

7 The Dremel is one of those multi-purpose tools that's handy in a pinch. I can't count the odd jobs I've completed with this thing

6



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I'd just changed out the original 500k pots for one-megs to get more of that Jazzmaster brightness out of it, so my first thought was that I'd forgotten to hook up a ground.

I rechecked my work and nope: everything was right as rain. I continued my restring and plugged into my Marshall, only to discover that touching the strings merely dampened the usual ground noise but didn't totally squelch the offending tones. Puzzled, I pulled out my multimeter, set it to continuity mode and checked on the connection between the bridge posts (which I knew were properly grounded) and the strings.

In continuity mode, touching the two probes to different surfaces produces a beep that lets you know that they're electrically connected. It's a good tool for checking for wiring faults and whether or not you've mixed up the terminals of an output jack, as I often do. I just get too excited at the end of a job, I suppose!

Touching the probes to these locations, I waited for a beep and heard none. Curious. I touched the probes to the saddles and the bridge post. Again, no beep. Curiouser. I then touched one probe to the treble-side post and the other to the bass-side post. No beep. Curiouser and curiouser!

Clearly, the connection to ground that was supposed to be taking care of the bridge wasn't getting through to the strings. But why? If it's all metal, why wouldn't the treble post also be grounding the other, as well as the saddles and strings? Well, it all comes down to the colour.

Anodising is a process by which the thickness of the natural oxide layer on a piece of aluminium is increased, making it less susceptible to corrosion, and able to be coloured. Ever encountered an anodised aluminium 'guard on a Jazzmaster? This is why they're often gold, one of many colours that can be applied to the surface layer.

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8 Testing with the multimeter in continuity mode – so far so good

9 More testing. You can never be too sure

10 With the bridge reinstalled, I'm hearing a healthy beep from everything that makes contact with the strings. We've got ground

11 I am absolutely in love with this baritone

The other thing about the anodic layer is that it is insulative, meaning that it's not a good conductor like bare aluminium. So, when you're installing an anodised pickguard on a guitar that didn't have one previously, you'll have to sand down to bare metal anywhere you're mounting an electronic component to the back of the pickguard.

In the case of this black anodised Mastery Bridge, it's the very layer that ensures the bridge fits so well with my Galactic Empire colour scheme that's preventing it from grounding properly. There is some good news though: this is a relatively easy fix. Just like the pickguard I mentioned earlier, all I need to do to create a more sound connection from post to saddle is remove a bit of the black layer.

To do this, I cut out a circle of sandpaper and attach it to a small screwdriver, which I then insert in the bridge-post screw holes and spin around on the underside of the bridge base to mark how much material I want to remove. After this, it's a simple matter of breaking out a Dremel with a sanding attachment and bringing the job to its conclusion.

After I remove the black layer where the bridge and posts meet, I reinstall the bridge and fire up the multimeter to check my work. Sure enough, when I touch a probe to bare metal, I'm greeted by a pleasant beep. Upon plugging in, the instrument is as quiet as Obi-Wan powering down a tractor beam.

Oh, and if you happen to be wondering why I didn't remove material on top for the saddle-height adjustment screws, it's because the downward force and vibration of the strings has basically pushed them through the black layer, so they're already touching the aluminium beneath. Job done. Never tell me the odds.

Follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen

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FIVE MINUTES TO...

ST VINCENT

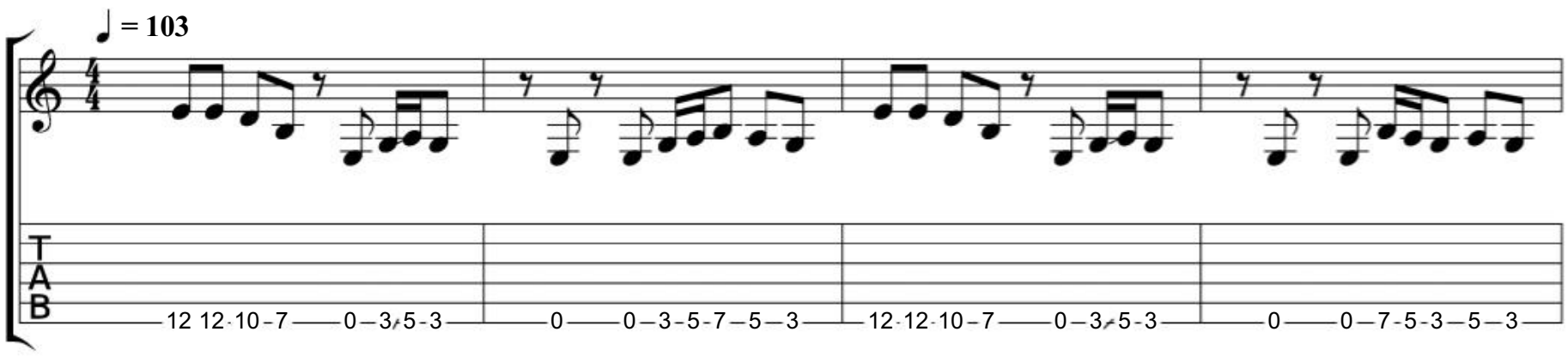
WORDS LEIGH FUGE

As a guitar player, Annie Clark is defiantly individual and thrillingly unconventional. From single-string riffs to stabbing chords, the hallmarks of her style can be used to freshen up your playing too

It's all too tempting to take the safe option when writing riffs and solos. Just stick a pentatonic run here, slap a powerchord there and it's job done. Annie Clark has never cared for the safe option, and she has spent her career showcasing myriad ways to make the guitar feel challenging, fresh and exciting. So crank up your fuzz pedals and prepare to get angular as we pick out some stylistic tricks from St Vincent's playing that you can use to add some interest to your own guitar parts and compositions.

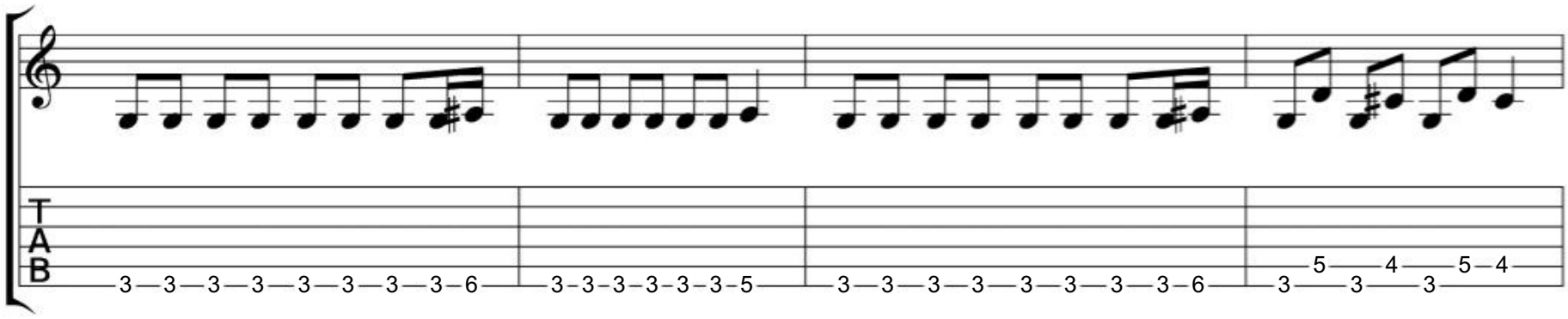
SAINTLY ONE-STRING RIFFS

St Vincent's songs often feature riffs that are spread out across a single string in a way that requires dynamic fretting-hand movement. These distinctive one-string workouts also lend their songs an interconnected feel. Check out this E natural minor riff, which takes in most of the low E string.

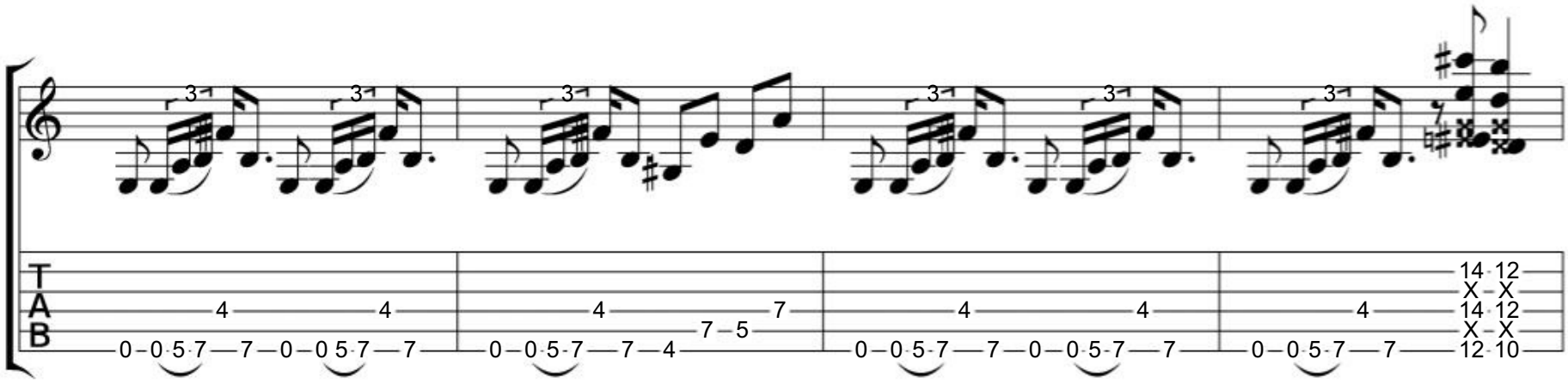


SYNTH-LIKE STABS

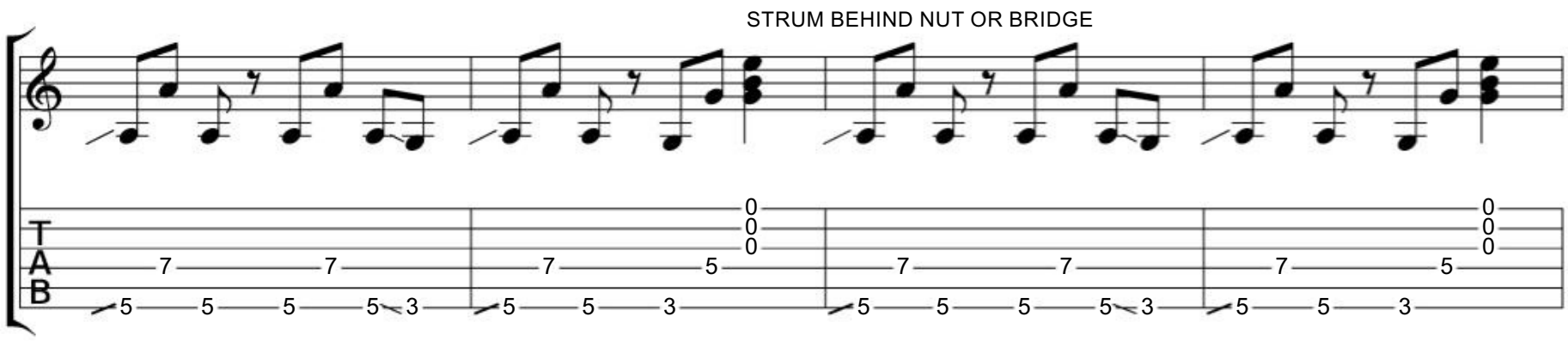
A hallmark of Clark's more recent work is her use of effects and angular riffs to strip her instrument of its most recognisable characteristics, so that it barely sounds like a guitar at all. This example combines fuzz with an octave effect to create a stabbing, synth-like riff. Add a little dissonance during the final bar with the flat-5 note (the fourth fret on the A string), another St Vincent trademark.



WORKING THE ANGLES

As you've no doubt learnt already, if you want to emulate St Vincent, you have to be prepared to get a little weird with your riffs, as this busy, angular example demonstrates. The interesting chord stabs that close out the riff are made up of an octave with an additional sixth on the top. It's this sort of arresting compositional thinking that makes St Vincent songs so compelling.

BRIDGING THE GAPS

On the surface, this might seem like a simple octave riff but, like many St Vincent guitar parts, it contains a unique quirk. Every two bars, the open strings on the tab are played either behind the bridge or behind the nut. This delivers a harsh, jarring sound that, when paired with fuzz, results in another unorthodox and non-guitar-like texture.



Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MusicTeacher.com platform. He has more than 10 years of experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find guitar tutors in your area, visit musicteacher.com

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CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE GEORGE HARRISON PART II

WORDS ROD FOGG

In the second part of our George Harrison workshop, we explore the major and minor sevenths, diminished sevenths and flat five chords employed by the quiet Beatle as he stepped up to a solo career

Up against the massive personalities (and egos) of Messrs Lennon and McCartney, it's not surprising that during the Beatle years, George Harrison rarely contributed more than one or two songs to each long player.

After The Beatles' breakup, however, the brakes were off. Harrison suddenly found himself with a bold back catalogue of sensational songs that had never made it onto an album – all constructed using clever chord work.

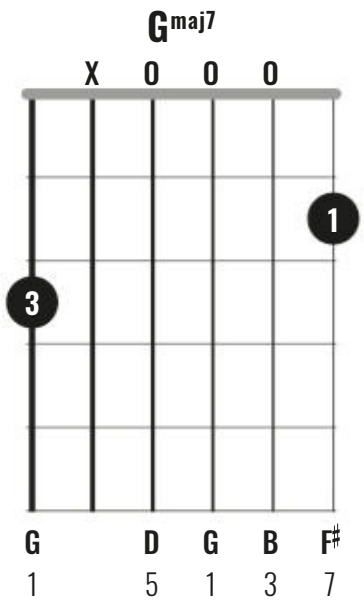
Here, we're concentrating on this post-Beatles work, much of which demonstrates how Harrison grew as a musician, making fascinating, unusual choices and breaking away from the common four-bar structures to develop his own identity as a songwriter.

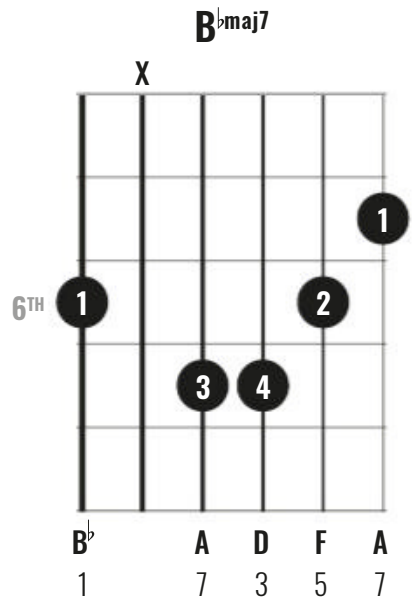
Enjoy experimenting with some Harrison harmony and we'll see you next time, when we'll unveil an exciting new format for Chord Clinic.

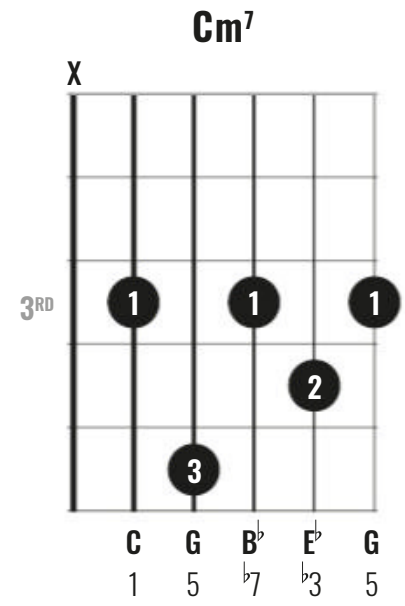
Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

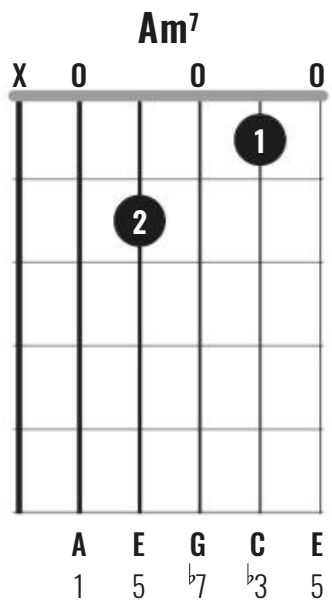
FIGURE 1

Ideally, you'd strum this sequence on your acoustic, making the most of those rich major seventh and minor seventh chords. Try going back to the Gmaj7 chord after Cm7 and then adding in the last three chords. Don't worry if it doesn't come out as an eight-bar phrase, six-bar sections were not unusual for Harrison at this stage. In the B♭maj7 chord, your index finger is holding down the sixth fret on the low E string with its tip, and the fifth fret on the high E string with its base. This might feel unfamiliar but you'll get used to it with practise.









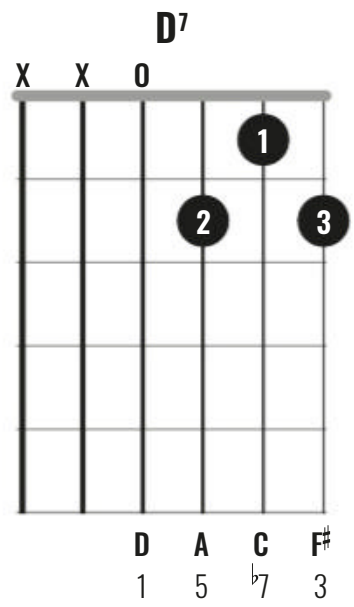


FIGURE 2

Here we have a simple sequence involving chords I, II and V in D major but with the addition of a colourful and rarely seen Cdim7, played between D and E minor. As with figure 1, we're aiming for a strummed acoustic texture here – try it with a capo at the second fret for added sparkle. You could also try making up some more parts in the same style using the Em and A7 chords, or even D and B minor.

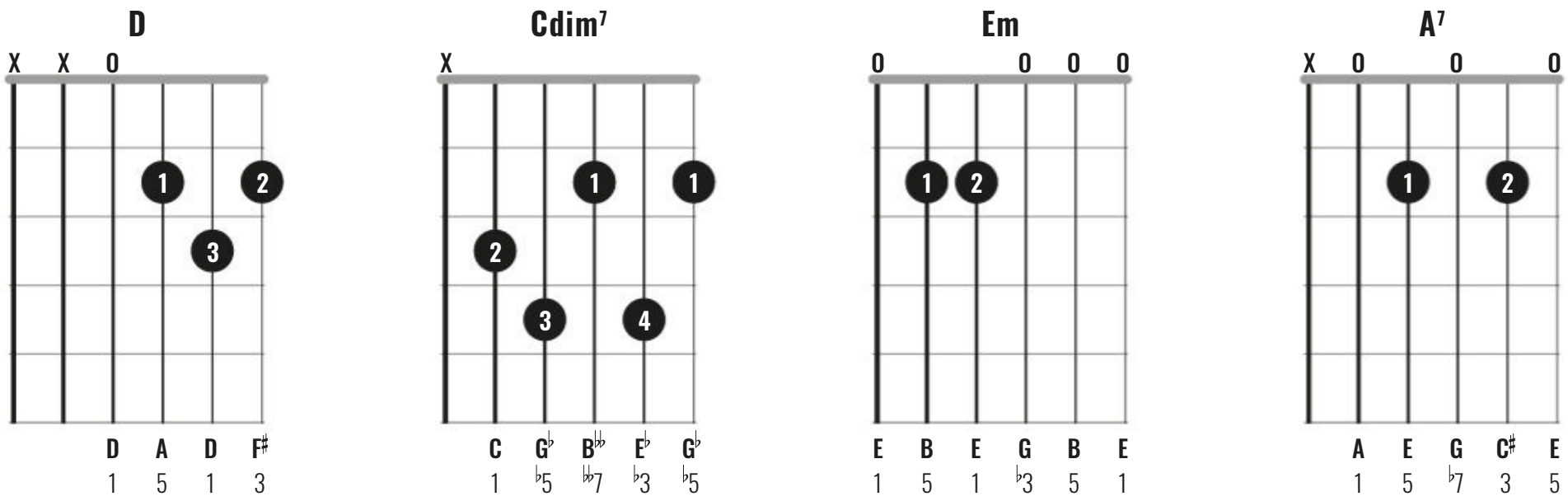


FIGURE 3

This four-chord sequence is inspired by a song using one of the most unusual chords there is: a major chord with a flat five. G major is usually G, B and D. Here, we have G, B and D♭. It's a very crunchy and out-there sound, which resolves beautifully down to the C major chord and then back to G major. We've gone for the fingering that we feel works best but you could try the first two chords with your thumb hooked over the low E string at the third fret. It takes self-confidence to use a chord like this – it's a clear example of Harrison's growth as a songwriter.

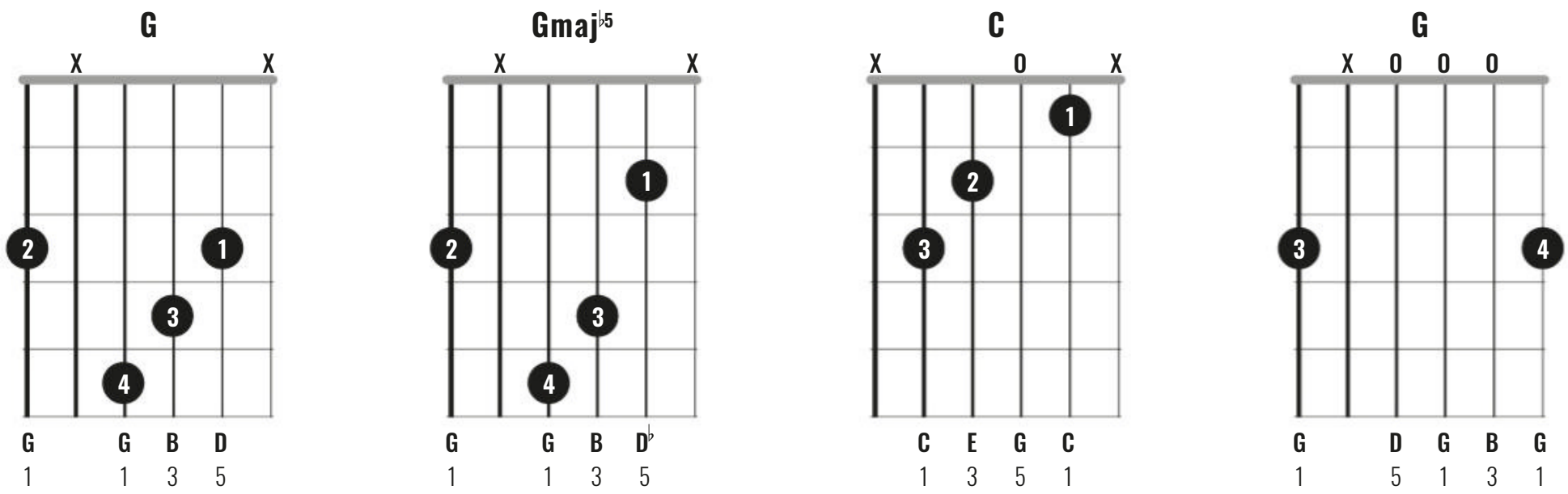
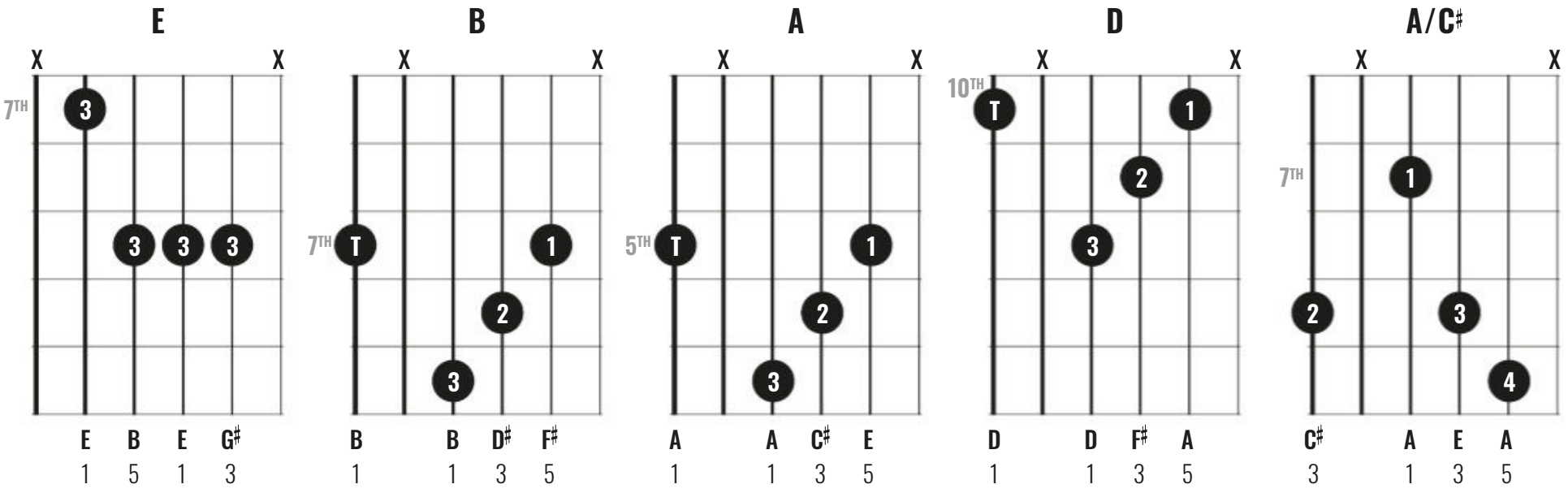


FIGURE 4

For this phrase, we're inspired by Harrison's more rockin' predilections. This one should work well on electric, with a crunch tone and a quick tempo. The idea is to go around the first three chords as a four-bar sequence and then add the last two chords as a kind of tag, ending up back on the B major and heading round to the top of the loop. Notice how the slash chord smooths out the transition from D to B. Try it with the root position A major too and see which one you prefer.



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TALKBOX

MRS SMITH

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The alter ego of actor-musician David Hanbury is making a big noise in the digital world. Here, she discusses the importance of practising your vibrato and explains how high-fashion photoshoots can ruin your hair

The moment it all started...

"In the 1990s, I was kidnapped and held for ransom by a Norwegian death metal band, and I suffered Stockholm syndrome. I spent three months in a closet with nothing but a guitar and mastered the instrument to save my own life. I joined the band, eventually overtaking them completely. In the end, these men all died in a fire that I did not start."

I couldn't live without my...

"My wah-wah pedal."

The one that got away...

"I once bought a random Ibanez on Craigslist. It was plain wood, and I have no idea what model it was, but it ripped. I couldn't keep it because I don't believe in unpainted guitars, you see; I have a personal philosophy that they're an abomination. Unpainted guitars put my eyes to sleep. Looking at them makes me want to fall into such a deep sleep that I just die and cross over and I'm finally reunited with old friends and colleagues. At the time, I didn't know you can hire people to paint guitars. If I'd known that, I would have kept it and had this horror remedied. Instead, I cast it out. I hope someone painted it."

My signature model...

"It would be a Superstrat, of course. Floating whammy bar. Two humbuckers. I'd want a rosewood fingerboard because my fingers are very pale, and they tend to blend in with maple fretboards. I would want it to be fancifully designed to wake up the eyes. It should be like a fabulous accessory, like a gorgeous handbag or necklace. My hope is that people would hang it on their wall and say, 'My god, that's a work of art'. I would design it so that people who don't even know who I am would be dazzled and buy it and discover new vistas of expression and shred madness. I would want it to not be too heavy, so that I can do wild stage moves. Maybe someone will build me one of these someday…"

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"A riff that I wrote but have yet to record, because it's kick-ass."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"Stop and listen to your vibrato. Playing fast is glorious but when we conclude a blistering run, there's a pinnacle note that's likely to be more important than all of those other notes. It's where we land and, once we're there, what is the vibrato statement? Does it sound like a housefly that got into the crystal meth? Usually, the secret is to slow down the vibrato and practise, practise, practise every note with every finger, as they're all different."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"This is maybe more *Absolutely Fabulous*… I was in a fashion shoot for a global, mega-brand that will remain nameless. It was my first time doing something like this, so I was quite nervous. I arrived at the shoot early in the morning with my hair already done by a stylist in the European city where we were shooting. The stylist for the brand said that it looked perfect – no need to change anything. Nonetheless, she began to work on my hair as the makeup artist did her thing. An hour later, she spun me around and my hair was a monstrosity. My head looked like a beehive that'd been beaten with a baseball bat and we had 10 minutes to get to the set. I fled the trailer, overwhelmed, followed by two producers shouting in British accents, 'What's the matter? She's the best! She's done top pop stars!' They talked me down and I returned to the trailer and apologised. The stylist replied, 'Oh, that was nothing. I've worked with Naomi Campbell'."

If only I was in the band...

"The Shaggs."

I wish I was there...

"Whichever Jimi Hendrix gig made Pete Townshend meet Eric Clapton at the movies."

The first thing on my rider...

"Sparkling water, healthy fats, and protein chunks everywhere."

If I could just play one thing...

"I wish I could do that funky rhythm playing like Nile Rodgers."

Mrs Smith's latest single *Antifa Niece* is out now

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